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In the Name of Speculation
Aspects of W.S. Merwin's Poetry

by

Lidija Davidovska

B.A., Cyril and Methodius University, 1981

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements

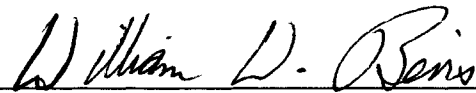
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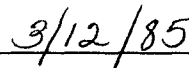
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Dawn. The horizon
opens its lashes,
begins to see. What? Names.
They are on the patina

of things... ("The Names," Jorge
Guillen)

Davidovska, Lidija, March 6, 1985

English

In the Name of Speculation: Aspects of W.S. Merwin's Poetry

Director: William Bevis



The main premise: the relationship of Merwin's epistemology to his aesthetic as it finds expression in the concept of speculation, underlies all the chapters of this thesis.

The concept of speculation as the most important principle of Merwin's poetics is explained as a process of epistemological discovery the speaker of the poem undergoes. The speaker reflects on a particular experience in such a way that what is experienced is fully comprehended only in the process of coming to know it. The poem is the thinking process of the speaker.

The poem is a mirror image of the speculative process. Thus the experience of reality in Merwin's poetry appears as if transferred to the poem without an artistic attempt to hide the process which led to that experience. This direct representation of reality I call "naming." Metaphor, on the other hand, through the equation of two objects ("hair--gold,") changes and distorts reality in order to recreate a new reality.

Simile in Merwin's poetry, is an aesthetic celebration of what is in reality. Unlike metaphor, simile doesn't change reality by substitution of one object for another. Simile reveals the speaker's mind moving from one issue to another, linking them together by association.

The second chapter discusses the general tone of Merwin's poetry as a result of the speculative rhythm. The poetic language, through line breaks, punctuation or lack of punctuation, and repetitions, reveals a speculative rhythm--the rhythm of the epistemological discovery of reality. Here again, the relationship of epistemology and aesthetic is given testimony by the poetic language reflecting this relationship.

The third chapter also deals with the general, speculative tone, now seen as a result of some recurrent themes and motifs. These recurrent themes and motifs are articulated through concrete human situations in which the themes are approached from two different aspects: a psychological aspect, revealing the emotional effects on the speaker of the poem in the process of speculation, and a philosophical aspect revealing the calming wisdom-seeking solution - seeking tone which the speaker resumes after the emotional climax is undergone. The speculation of the speaker is not conducive to reaching ultimate conclusions, which suggests the impossibility of final definitive answers to the questions the speaker asks himself in the poem. Thus the tentative and unresolved character of the philosophic reflection within the poem is mirrored by and reinforced by the tentative rhythm and the speculative stance of the poem.

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INTRODUCTION

In these three chapters on Merwin's poetry I introduce some concepts which are crucial for the critical investigation of Merwin's poetry. The first chapter will discuss the concept of Naming. The second chapter will discuss tone as illustrated through the speculative rhythm of Merwin's poetry. The third chapter will discuss Tone as revealed through recurrent themes and motifs. These concepts, along with Merwin's use of simile, personification, and speculation, are the main principles of Merwin's poetics.

In order to understand the concepts of Naming, it is necessary first to clarify the concept of speculation.

Speculation in Merwin's poetry is reflection on an aspect of reality, a particular experience, or a concept. It is mainly a process of questioning, discovering and comprehending a particular aspect of reality by the speaker of the poem (the poetic "I"). The speaker of the poem speculates on a particular experience, and the poem presents the process of his discovery of what has happened, is happening, and will happen. It is an epistemological discovery of an experience. However, the speculative process, by which the speaker reflects on the experience, doesn't follow a rational mode of thinking. Merwin's speculation is not simply a logical demonstration of what the speaker has already discovered. The speaker need not have a defined stance towards that experience. Speculation is more an active process of reflection upon an experience including its emotional effects upon the speaker. This

speculation can take rise from an encounter with an object, a feeling, a mood, or an abstract idea. Speculation, in other words, is an organically structured experience represented by and occurring within the poem. It is developed in a concrete human situation. We find the speaker reflecting on a particular experience in such a way that what is experienced is fully comprehended only in the process of coming to know it. Therefore, speculation is more than a rhetorical device in Merwin's poetry. It is the subject matter as well as the rhetoric of the poem.

Speculative experience which is the material of Merwin's poetry is mirrored also in his general style which implies a passive and reflective attitude rather than an active and engaged one. Everything which happens in the poem is seen and thus presented through the prism of the speaker's mind. The poem eventuates in the thinking process of the speaker; it presents the happening of the thought in progress; it is the rhythm of living thought. It presents the thinking, the reflective process itself as it exists outside the boundaries of the poem. These poems catch thought in action with its digressions, silences and emotional outcries. Because the experience is a process, the representation of that process is a kind of identifying or "Naming." Thus the poem itself is a mirror image of the speculative process. The poem produces an artistic simulacrum of the speculative process transferred to the realm of poetry.

Thus in Merwin's poetry the experience of reality is transferred to the poem without an artistic attempt to hide

the process of discovery which led to that experience. The metaphorical equation, one object standing for something else ("hair--gold") is a change of reality. Metaphor changes and distorts reality in order to recreate a new reality. In Merwin's poetry the process of the epistemological discovery of an experience is itself the subject of the poem. The stance of the speaker towards the experience is in a process of formation. In Merwin's poetry the phrase, "I don't know" often appears. The speaker names the experience in order to understand it. It seems as if speculation often begins for the speaker involuntarily, that is, without prior conscious intention to think something through, explicitly. Because the process of speculation is not premeditated in its inception, it is inevitable that the speaker's stance, his attitude towards the experiences within the poem, is also in a process of formation. Metaphor, on the other hand, often supposes that the speaker already has a definite attitude toward the experience because the experience must already be ordered and contained in order to be compared or equated by metaphor.

Naming is in direct opposition to metaphor. Naming encapsulates reality rather than creating it. It is an artistic celebration of what is in reality, that reality including both stimulus and speculative response issuing in Naming. We shall see how simile participates in this celebration.

In Merwin's poetry speculation is often accomplished by the use of simile. Simile reveals the speaker's mind

moving from one issue to another, or from one object of perception to another, linking them together by association. Thus, for example, in the poem "Now and Again" the walnuts and the human brain both appear in the poem. The image of the human brain occurs to the speaker because of the physical similarity between the brain and the meat of the walnut:

The hammered leaves the walnuts
Drop to the road and open:
Here is the small brain of our extinct summer.
Already it remembers nothing.¹

Here, even though we are confronted with a metaphorical transformation, ("walnut--human brain"), we still can talk about simile, because this type of metaphor (characteristic to Merwin's poetry) has the force of simile. It reveals the connection between the objects: stimulus (walnuts--physical reality) and speculative response (human brain). This stimulus--speculative response exposes the functioning of speculation in Merwin's poetry. Because the poem uses simile and this type of metaphor, it doesn't change reality by substitution of one object with another. Rather, the objects in the poem represent themselves, showing the connectedness of reality. Furthermore, simile illustrates the very process of this connection by the use of the phrases, "like" and "as." Simile leaves an actual tracing within the poetic structure of the speculative process.

... And that my words are garment of what I shall
never be
Like the tucked sleeve of a one-armed boy.²

Thus, through simile, the poem names the experience.

In Merwin's poetry, the use of speculation and simile substantiates the principle of Naming. This notion of Naming however, is particular to Merwin's poetry and differs from other notions of Naming, such as Heidegger's. The central characteristic of Naming in Merwin's poetry is that the experience in the poem appears as if transferred to the poem without artistic change.

In contrast to Heidegger, for example, Naming in Merwin's poetry does not "give Being" to the particular experience of the poem. For Merwin, Naming puts together or reconstructs the elements of a particular experience or aspect of reality, but does not create that reality. Naming functions aesthetically to show how the poet presents an experience in the poem. It is not a concept which implies that poetry has ontological power of creating reality.

Personification, particularly an aspect of personification, conceptualization, is another significant stylistic figure in Merwin's poetry that sheds light on the concept of Naming. Personification ascribes human characteristics first to an abstract concept: the class of nonhuman, and only then to the particular and concrete objects and nonhuman beings. Thus, the particular objects "shoes" are first seen as an abstract concept--inanimate objects "laughing" and "dancing"--and only then as particular objects "shoes," "laughing" and "dancing." The particular object, for example, "hammer," is first seen in the poem as an abstract concept, for example, "tool." The particular objects

speculating in the poem upon their existence are more important as a class of nonhuman talking (speculating), than as particular objects. It is the class of the nonhuman which, in its purposiveness, reveals certain patterns of existence. These patterns exhibit an interrelationship between the class of inanimate objects or nonhuman beings and man. The former affect and change man as well as being affected and changed by man. At the same time, these inanimate objects and nonhuman beings appear in the poem as independent from man, talking, reflecting upon their place and revealing truths about man who has given them that place. Thus Merwin's poetry reveals the interconnectedness, the web-like structure, of reality which is mirrored in the speculative process.

The rhythm of living thought in the poem finds expression in the rhythm of the poetic language. I call this rhythm "speculative" because it reflects the digressions, the silences, and the breaks in thought of the speaker who is engaged in the speculative process. Thus the rhythm reveals the emotions of the speaker and his frustrations in attempting to articulate his world. The characteristics of this speculative rhythm are line breaks, lack of punctuation and repetition. It is the rhythm of epistemological discovery of the experience by the speaker. As such, it reinforces the artistic effect of the speculative process taking place at the actual moment when we read the poem.

Tone may also be analyzed from another aspect, that of recurrent themes and motifs. The questions the speaker

asks himself in the poem are often questions about his place as a human being thrust into the givenness of the world; questions about the possibility of universal love and acceptance of life as gift given from nature; questions about the limits of knowledge and the possibility of self knowledge; questions about god, gods, and loneliness. Merwin's poetry never provides simple answers to these ultimate questions. The speculation of the speaker suggests this impossibility of final, definitive answers. In fact, the process of speculation itself is not conducive to reaching ultimate conclusions. Speculation is more a state of mind burdened with questions which involuntarily occur to the speaker. The speaker responds to these questions reflectively, trying to discover their origin rather than their solution. This speculative process thus reveals an awareness of the final incomprehensibility of life. The poem does not claim to have discovered ultimate answers. The poems present the speaker as confronting and striving to understand these questions. The speaker dwells on the multiple aspects of these issues but never proposes answers or solutions to them.

These recurring questions or themes in Merwin's poetry are always presented in the framework of a concrete human situation. These concrete human situations provide psychological and philosophical nexus for the poem. The situation reveals the emotional effects on the speaker and the philosophical dilemma of trying to reconcile the irreconcilable. The emotionally affected voice in the poem muffles

its cry with the philosophical wisdom that the nature of these irreconcilable issues is universal and recurrent in the lives of all humans. Thus the tentative and unresolved character of the philosophic reflection within the poem is mirrored by and reinforced by the tentative rhythm and the speculative stance of the poet.

CHAPTER ONE

NAMING

The main concept to be defined and discussed in this chapter will be that of Naming considered as one of the aesthetic principles of W.S. Merwin's poetry. The relationship of this principle to the personal epistemology¹ of the poet, will be the next point of discussion. The importance of this relationship lies in the premise that the epistemology of a poet (a writer) most directly influences his/her aesthetic. In other words, the presence and the formulation of his aesthetic principles depends upon the way the poet discovers and comprehends reality. In Merwin's poetry, the speaker of the poem discovers his experience through speculation. This speculation actually is a process of epistemological discovery of the experience. It doesn't follow a rational mode of thinking, or demonstrate a logical development of the speaker's thought. Speculation in Merwin's poetry reveals the speaker's struggle to comprehend the experience fully, in order to know it. Because the poem presents the very process of such discovering, reality appears as if transferred in the poem without an artistic change or distortion, as opposed to metaphorical recreation of reality. In other words, the poem presents the process of cognition and comprehension of reality as if the speaker undergoes it at the moment of reading the poem.

Thus, the poem names reality. The principle of Naming is realized through speculation. Speculation substantiates

the principle of Naming. We can say that in Merwin's poetry the idea of Naming the epistemological discovery of an experience in language is realized through speculation, a principle of Merwin's aesthetic as well as of his epistemology. This speculative stance towards reality clearly shows the interdependence of the two main aspects of the creative process, epistemology and aesthetic.

To examine the principle of Naming further we shall discuss another significant characteristic of Merwin's poetry: the predominance of simile over metaphor. Simile is looked upon as another way of substantiation and ramification of the idea of Naming. If Naming implies reality transferred into a poem without an artistic distortion or change, then simile, also, is a way of Naming reality. By showing the connection of two objects compared ("is like") simile presents the actual process of equation of these objects without an artistic illusion of one object being something other than it really is, that is, A standing for B, as is the case with metaphorical equation. In that respect, simile confirms the idea of a reality transferred as opposed to a reality re-created. On the other hand, simile, by connecting the objects of comparison often on an associative basis, reveals itself as a part of the speculative process. Thus, the human being, thrust into the givenness of the world, speculates about it and discovers the connectedness of the world through simile.

Besides naming reality (the poetic experience), simile names the objects of comparison; since the objects are in

the poem, representing themselves, they stand for their literal as well as for their figurative meaning.

Personification is another predominant stylistic figure in Merwin's poetry which substantiates the idea of Naming through a conceptualization as an aspect of personification. Human characteristics are ascribed first to an abstract concept, the class of nonhuman, and only then to the concrete, particular object or being. Thus, "shoes laughing" presupposes the abstract concept--an inanimate object "laughing," and only then "shoes," the concrete and particular objects "laughing." This conceptualization implies Naming because a concrete object is named as an abstract concept in the poem.

By discussing these three aspects of Naming (speculation, simile, personification) we can define the concept and its ramifications further. I will approach the concept of Naming in reference to Merwin's poetry from an epistemological aspect, that is, from the aspect of poetry as the Naming of the cognition and comprehension of reality. By naming reality through speculation, simile and personification, Merwin's poetry doesn't re-create reality by distorting its original shape in the poetic language of the poem. Instead, it puts the interlocking rings of the great nexus of reality together.

Before we start charting the concept of Naming in W.S. Merwin's poetry, we should discuss some other understandings and applications of it.

The origins of the term Naming can be traced back to

Christian tradition, where the word of God naming the world is equal to God creating the world. The Gospel of John begins:

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was
with God, and the Word was God. (John 1:1)

and later in the same Gospel:

And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among
us, ... (John 1:14)

Here, the power of the Word is to be understood as the power of language in Christian religion. However, the Christian doctrine of winning the sould of people through words, actually starts by being itself named. The coming of John the Baptist before Christ can be understood as the naming of Christ, since by announcing his coming, he introduces the concept of Christ:

... This was he of whom I spake
He that cometh after me is preferred before me;
for he was before me. (John 1:15)³

His name, "John the Baptist," often bears the idea of giving name. In Eastern Orthodox tradition, baptising primarily means giving name to a newborn child with which its individual existence as such is recognized.

On the other hand, the idea of God naming the world ("And God said: Let there be light. And there was light.") and Heidegger's idea of Naming as giving Being, invoking things into presence, convey a similar relation between language and Being: the step between the Naming of a thing and its Being is indiscernable; they are happening

simultaneously. This is the ontological aspect of language, language as Being, implied in the idea of Naming.

To approach Naming from epistemological point of view we should begin with the concept of personal epistemology. First, by personal epistemology I refer mostly, but not exclusively, to the creative genius of the writer, so individual that it is impossible to talk about any common principles. However, one of the main factors which greatly influences a writer's aesthetic is the way he/she absorbs and comprehends reality. In other words, a poet's epistemology influences his/her language (poetry) as the epistemology of a whole era influences the language (literature) of that era.⁴ Needless to say, that the general mode of thinking is in direct relation with all individual ones. The individual epistemology of the writer is shaped by his/her temperament, intellect, and the whole network of other individual characteristics. Ortega y Gasset, even though negatively, mentions "temperament" in relation to aesthetic. Criticising nineteenth century aesthetics, he says:

Art is reflected life, nature seen through a temperament representation of human destinies, and so on.⁵

Also, we find that the Greek word for "spirit," "pneuma," originally meant "wind," "breath."⁶ Thus, by poetry referred to as "breath," or "breathing," the idea of poetry as part of the poet's essential nature is suggested, bearing the essence of that nature, as the speaker's breathing determines the rhythm of his/her speech. Rilke, in the last stanza

of the "Third Sonnet to Orpheus" (I Series), also calls poetry "breath."

True singing is a different kind of breath
A breath about nothing. A gust in the god. A wind.⁷

An imagined graphic presentation of the relationship of a poet's epistemology and aesthetic, would be a straight line with four main points: 1) poet's individuality (temperament), 2) his/her epistemology, 3) his/her aesthetic, 4) general mode of thinking characteristic of an era.

To see how a mode of thinking and cognition of reality influences a writer's aesthetics we shall bring, as an example, W.B. Yeats' poem, "No Second Troy." Yeats, in his poetry, usually starts with a concrete experience toward which he already has a defined attitude on which he then metaphorically comments. Thus, in "No Second Troy," at the end of the poem, Troy becomes a metaphor which comprises all the aspects of Maud Gonne's impact on Yeats' life and on the Irish National Movement. This metaphor reflects his defined attitude towards the experience of the poem. The metaphor reflects his admiration and his bitterness towards Maud Gonne. This active response is directly opposite to a speculative mode of dealing with the experience where the attitude of the poet is hidden in the process of cognition of that experience which is often itself the subject-matter of the poem. As we said in relation to Yeats' poem, in order for the poet to use metaphor, he should have a certain disposition toward the experience on which he stands in order to compare it, to equate it with something else.

With speculation as a mode of presentation of the experience, if there is an attitude on the side of the poet towards the experience, it is a discovery, cognition of the experience. Thus, the attitude of the poet, or of the speaker in the poem, is in a process of defining itself through the speculative process. In this respect, Naming, which names reality by putting together the elements of the speaker's experience without metaphorical change of reality, names the speculation in the poem.

In order to define Naming more precisely, we should take up the opposition between Naming and metaphor and follow it further.

First, the relationship between the two things in metaphor is: A stands for B. This is the simplest way to approach metaphor, but it reveals the essential relationship of two objects established by metaphor. It is a trope which exists in discursive language as well as in poetry, and is the most important source for rejuvenation of language. It is the living sap in the growth and development of language.

Metaphor is one of the "master tropes" in language and poetry. To explain the essence of metaphor and poetry, Kenneth Burke, in the essay "Four Master Tropes," says:

Language develops by metaphorical extension, in borrowing words from the realm of the corporeal, visible, tangible and applying them by analogy to the realm of the incorporeal, invisible, intangible; then in the course of time, the original corporeal reference is forgotten, and only the incorporeal, metaphorical extension survives (often because the very conditions of living that reminded one of the

corporeal reference have so altered that the cross reference no longer exists with near the same degree of apparentness in the "objective situation" itself); and finally, poets regain the original relation, in reverse, by a "metaphorical extension" back from the intangible into a tangible equivalent (the first "carrying over" from the material to the spiritual being compensated by a second "carrying₈ over" from the spiritual back into the material);...

This is very true when it refers to the essential nature of metaphorical re-creation of reality in poetry. However, to explain the essence of poetry, in general, as a process of finding lost corporeal references of now abstract concepts, is to reduce poetry to metaphors in constant process.

Metaphor is deeply rooted in language and thought; its creative power has been called by many the most powerful tool for the poetic change of the world. Ortega y Gasset says:

The metaphor is perhaps one of man's most fruitful potentialities. Its efficacy verges on magic, and it seems a tool for creation which God forgot inside one of His creatures when he made him.⁹

So, the creative power of metaphor implies change. We can call "a smile"--"sunshine;" or "hair"--"gold." It is a re-creation of reality in order to evoke a new reality from the poem.

Besides changing reality, metaphor also distorts reality in order to re-create it. In modern European poetry of the early part of the century, metaphorical distortion was one of the most important devices. The poem relies mostly on images which belong outside logical, matter of fact reality. Finally, this metaphorical distortion of reality destroys the tool of the artistic distortion--the metaphor.

The relationship between concepts based on metaphorical comparison is replaced by juxtaposition of concepts which create condensed images.

Here is an example of poetical distortion of reality by metaphor which at the end destroys itself. It is the poem "Song" by Federico G. Lorca, which can serve as a short treatise on metaphor, revealing the essential nature of metaphorical change of reality:

In the laurel branches
 I saw two dark pigeons.
 One was the sun
 the other was the moon.
 Little neighbours, I said to them,
 Where is my grave?
 In my tail, said the sun.
 In my throat, said the moon.
 And I who was walking
 with the earth up to my waist
 saw two eagles of marble
 and a naked girl.
 One was the other
 and the girl was neither.
 Little eagles, I said to them,
 Where is my grave?
 In my tail, said the sun.
 In my throat, said the moon.
 In the cherry branches
 I saw two naked pigeons.
 One was the other
 and both were neither.¹⁰

After "two dark pigeons" are introduced (line 2) the poem explains the metaphor (lines 3 and 4): they stand for "the sun" and "the moon." If we imagine a tentative poem for which this one is only an explanatory one lines (3) and (4) would be possibly dropped out and the metaphor would stand alone. "The sun" and "the moon" are "two eagles of marble," as the poem says later, in line (11). Thus, "the sun" and "the moon" can be different things ("two dark

pigeons," "two eagles of marble" and only "the sun" and "the moon"). Line (13) revealing the fictitious equation of objects by metaphor, "One was the other," destroys the metaphor. In the last lines (21, 22), the initial metaphor of the poem is negated with the negation of "the two dark pigeons: One was the other/and both were neither," revealing, at the same time, the idea of changing and rearranging reality by metaphor.

So, metaphor implies change, re-creation of reality. W.S. Merwin's poetry names reality (the poetic experience) without change presenting the process of cognition of reality itself. Metaphor is not a common device in this poetry; Simile is what is predominantly used. Simile is chosen as the most natural poetic device, since in the process of cognition, it ties the experience together. Different elements of the experience are connected by simile through associative comparisons of objects. Reality is not re-created by such comparisons; that is, "the sunshine" in the poem is nothing but "the sunshine," and, "the smile" is only like "the sunshine." So, two objects are equated by comparison and the chain between them ("is like") is still visible.

Simile also, is a development of the speculative experience, besides a simple comparison of objects. It is expansion of the experience. Thus, it becomes a part of the structure of the experience, that is, of the binding tissue of the structure. In this sense simile only names reality, that is, it extends the structure of the experience

instead of changing it. In this type of poetry "the sunshine" enters the poem as "sunshine;" that is, it is named, called into the presence of the poem, as "sunshine." Thus, the experience is named, put together, developed, as opposed to being re-created with metaphor. In this respect, metaphor is in direct opposition with Naming.

Metaphor, put in a simple, linear opposition with Naming, sheds some light on the concept of Naming. This opposition, it seems, is based on the assumption of either the presence or absence of change. Metaphor and simile in this context should be understood more broadly than as only stylistic figures. In this context, they are referred to as essential principles of different poetics.

To explain the concept of Naming in W.S. Merwin's poetry, we should start with speculation and the speculative way of presenting the poetic experience. Speculation is a reflective process by which the speaker recognizes and comprehends the tangled net of the experiences. In the poems we follow the process of speculation itself (speculation as a subject-matter) and/or the experience is presented in a speculative way. The poem "The Mountains," is an example of both:

There are days when I think the future sets
beyond the mountains
then I lay me down
in fear of departures

and a heavy
net drops on me when I wake
far
far in the night

borne on
 and the whole air
 around me crying for you
 even
 when you are still there

and a dog barking
 beyond it
 at an unknown distance

on and on¹¹

Here, step by step, line by line, the first speculative line: "There are days when I think the future sets," grows more substantial, encompassing the physical reality in the poem, "the mountains," "the dogs." The poem reaches the point where "friction" between the speculation ("thinking of future") and the physical surroundings ("the mountains," "the night," "the dogs") sparks a feeling ("crying for you"). Following the process of speculation here, it is hard to predict where the poem will lead us, as is true with any speculative process. However, speculation used in reference to Merwin's poetry should be understood more broadly than speculation in the classical sense; that is, as thinking or reflection, even though they are the main part of speculation. Here, speculation is more to be understood as reflection on a particular experience, starting at a certain point and growing into a unity with its own structure. As we saw from the example before, even though it is hard to see where the speculative voice would lead us, the poem reveals the structure the moment the voice reveals the emotional charge. In other words, the poem seizes the experience as a whole, the emotional and reflective aspects of it. Speculation in this poetry is mimesis. If we apply

the meaning of mimesis as imitation of action,¹² than Merwin's poetry imitates action (reality) through an action, through speculation, which is an aspect of reality.

A comparison of a poem by Merwin which can be called dynamic, that is, with more action than speculation, with a purely speculative poem of another contemporary poet, William Pitt Root, will shed some light on the meaning of speculation when applied to Merwin's poetry. Merwin's poem: "Walk-up:"

The inspector of stairs is on the stairs
 Oh my God and I thought it was Sunday,
 His advance like a broom and those stairs going
 Down to meet him, alright
 What that's mine will show me
 To be ashamed of this time

The spiders in my face, the whistles
 In the cupboards,
 The darkness in my shoes, going out
 To deep water

No

The sky's at home in these windows, and the maps
 Of themselves on these walls
 And your letter is enough improvement
 For anywhere, lying open
 On my table, my
 Love

I won't close a thing

Let him arrive fanning himself
 With his calender, let him become
 At the door the inspector of doors and find
 Mine open,
 Inspector of hands--

His name

Would mean nothing to me, his questions are not
 His own, but let my answers
 Be mine.¹³

In Merwin's poem, after the voice announces that "the inspector of stairs is on the stairs," it takes time to decide and give reasons why he won't "close anything." It delays the coming of the inspector speculating on the details. It is not just glancing on the surroundings ("the room," "the letter," "the maps") and intuitively deciding on the response towards the expected "inspector." He ponders on the details, so that we can see how important they are in the experience. So, "the maps," are "the maps of themselves," "the sky's at home in these windows," "the letter is enough improvement for anywhere," all build up his self-recognition and his self-acceptance. Here, the process of speculation happens even when the experience is so strictly fixed in time (expecting "the inspector" to "walk in"). We see that speculation in Merwin's poetry doesn't imply languid diffused, meditation; rather, it is a reflection on a particular experience. Also, in this poem speculation is the subject-matter of the poem since the poem charts and gives reasons why and how the objects come to be the objects of reflection. It reveals the hidden connections between the physical objects and the thought. There are many poems in Merwin's poetry which start with the poetic perception lingering on a physical object. The object associatively brings into the mind certain actions of particular experiences which from their part bring their emotional or intellectual sides. With other words, the speculation in the poem starting with a particular object which is reflected upon, brings up the whole experience

through a chain of associations. Thus, the physical object becomes a pivot around which the centrifugal dynamism of the experience starts revolving. "The Door:"

Do you remember how I beat on the door
kicked the door
as though I or the door were a bad thing
later it opened
I went in
nothing
starlight
snowing¹⁴

and W.P. Root's, "I Live Now Day By Hour:"

I live now day by hour, by glance and breath
I am content
until the stars rise dragging out the dogs of darkness,
my heart
that bays across their tongues
challenging the stars
as their circles tighten overhead
and my spirit loosens from my bones to take the
winds
that overwhelms the land of sleepers,
sealed and sane.¹⁵

Root's poem doesn't show any action happening except "baying" and "deranging," which are actions in a figurative sense; that is, it is figuratively that the "heart is baying to the dogs of darkness." However, the poem starting with the statement "I live day by hour...." and introducing speculation, develops the figurative actions throughout the poem, so that they follow progressively, and if we start following their progression, we find that the "heart" baying at "the stars" challenges them; then, his spirit loosens and he is able to take "the winds of the moon." At the end, the poem generalizes the actions as "deranging" the land of the "sane sleepers." So, his actions follow a

certain logical, cause-effect progression. In Merwin's poem, the voice lingers and speculates on the objects as the eye of the speaker catches them in the moment of expectation of "the inspector." In this respect, in Merwin's poem the speculation as a process of cognition and recognition of the experience anticipates the action, while Root's poem presents it. Merwin's poem is an observation of the action. In this respect, Merwin's poem is more speculative than Root's.

Speculation in Merwin's poetry reflects his epistemology. The poem presents an experience which has already happened, thus with distance; the speculation comes after the action. The speculative voice is, however, affected by the speculation upon the event which has already happened. But, even at the emotional climax, the voice is quiet. We can only hear the echoes and see the traces of action which has already happened. That is, we see the effects of an action but not its real fire. The lines which usually reveal the climax of emotional charge are short, repetitious, disconnected, revealing signs of the tornado of action leaving pieces of "broken" language:

How can I persuade today that it's
Here how can I
Say My
Love

Outlined in knives

or the last part of the same poem:

Oh with your face her face your

Face invisible
 With death my hands
 With my hands nothing oh with death my words
 With my words nothing
 One at the time

 Oh with death my
 Heart
 With my heart

 Lantern of ice

 Oh with her shoes
 hanging
 In the clock¹⁶

The speculative mode of dealing with experiences reveals Merwin's epistemology. This epistemology doesn't strictly follow any specific principles of thinking, inductive or deductive. The principle it follows is operative: to know the experience, to understand it. It is the epistemology of everyday occurrences, repetitious but always experienced as new, as if happening for the first time. This poetic cognizance of experiences underlies Merwin's aesthetics. The urge to know the experiences lead to revealing, developing the texture of the experiences through the principle of speculation. Thus, the experience is named through speculation.

Another aspect reflected in this epistemology is the poet's temperament. That is, the poet's temperament is an important factor in the choice of speculation as the most natural way of dealing with experiences. It is rather calm. It is a temperament which understands joy and pain as recurrent motifs of life. The rhythm of this poetry,

in general, which we might loosely call slow, reveals a strong belief in thought and reflection. Consequently, the general tone of this poetry is reflective. So, we can say that the poetic temperament chooses the mode of dealing with experiences, speculation, which from its own side, is a substantiation of the idea of Naming as the main principle of Merwin's poetics. Thus, his aesthetics is influenced by his personal epistemology. We come to a point where we can say that by defining speculation more precisely we deal again with the relationship of epistemology and aesthetic the result of which, speculation and the speculative mode, come to be chosen as ways of presenting the poetic experience.

Having analyzed speculation we should come back to the concept of Naming and define it closer in relation to speculation.

What is Naming? Naming is following the chain of speculation in the poem. It is attaching together the rings of the nexus of the speculative experience. It is not simply listing the elements of the experience, or creating a setting of the experience. It is naming the experience in such a way that it grows as an organic structure. Naming is unfolding the experience without metaphorical change (recreation) of reality. "The sky" is called "sky," "air"--"air." It implies evoking the objects of reality into the presence of the poem where they play their dynamic role in the experience. "Door" is called "door" and it enters the poem as "door" representing an object, and a particular

point on which the speculative perception lingers. Later on, as the poem develops, the object might gain a specific significance in the poem as a whole. But initially it enters as "door," representing its "dooriness," that is, not as a symbol or metaphor. We can quote some examples where the poems start with physical objects which the speculative "eye" in the poem catches:

This is the place where a door might be
 here where I am standing
 in the light outside all the walls...¹⁷

Oh pile of white shirts who is coming
 to breathe in your shapes to carry your numbers
 to appear
 what hearts
 are moving toward their garments here
 their days
 what troubles beating between arms...¹⁸

Naming the experience this way, the poem reveals the intricate texture of reality (experience). That is, it shows the connectedness of the objects of reality as it exists outside the poem. Here, Naming differs from Heidegger's idea of Naming. For Heidegger the concept of an object of reality doesn't exist before it is named. For him the concept of Naming bears ontological implications, while Naming in Merwin's poetry is epistemologically grounded. Naming here is focusing and bringing "to light" verbally the already present (existing) aspects of reality. It is charting the experience out of the tangled net of reality. Naming in the Heideggerian sense is giving life to things which existed before in the primordial chaotic stage of inarticulateness of language and thought. Naming in

Heidigger's aesthetic and ontology is probably most specifically defined when he takes on the task (a gratifying one) of defining the essence of the parental role of poetry in giving Being to things of reality:

The poet names the gods and names all things in that which they are. This naming does not consist merely in something already known being supplied with a name; it is rather that when the poet speaks the essential word, the existent is by this naming nominated as what it is. So it becomes known as existent. Poetry is the establishing of being by means of the word.¹⁹

Since we spoke figuratively of "the tangled net" of reality in connection with Naming; that is, Naming as revealing such a texture, it is interesting to mention that the words "cobweb," "spider," and "net" appear very often in this poetry:

Those refugees,

Webs without spiders, needs without choice,...²⁰

I have seen the spider's triumph
In the palm of my hand...²¹

I came home as a web to its spider,
To teach the flies of my household
Their songs....²²

In this poetry there is certain awareness that reality resembles a "tangled net" from which the poem only disentangles an experience. That is, the poem through speculative process and Naming separates it from "the net" in order to understand it--comprehend it.

O web

over the sand you are woven
over the water you are woven

over the snow you are woven
 over the grass you are woven
 over the mountains you are woven
 over the heads of the lambs you are woven
 over the fish you are woven
 over the faces you are woven
 over the clouds you are woven
 over pain itself you are woven²³

The part of the poem listing the elements which are "under web" thus, names the reality as a tangled web-like structure. It is the all-penetrating "eye" of poetry that tries to discern the realities "under" it. In this way, the poem bring the experience in the light, that is, disentangles its texture in order to spin it as a separate one.

We mentioned that the poem, by naming, only attaches the rings of the chain of the experience. Simile is one of the ways of connecting them. Simile here is not only a simple comparison. It is expansion and branching of "the tree" of the experience. The new element the simile introduces is not from the outside of the experience. It belongs to the same environment. The new element is something like the next point on which the mind's eye of the poem pauses in the process of speculation. Now we come to the comparison of reality as "web" again: simile connecting or finding the connections among things in reality, actually is spinning of the texture of an experience. It implies that the speculative eye in the poem sees reality, experienced as a net-like appearance. Simile is a way to chart and follow the intricate texture of a particular experience. The connection between the things in simile relationship is

visible, because the thread of connection ("is like") is made explicit in the poem. Comparison is often the less relevant aspect of simile. The development of the experience, the branching of its structure is of primary importance. In relation to the concept of Naming, simile comes as a natural device to be used in this poetry. As we have mentioned before, the poem names the experience as it moves along, following the speculative process going on in the poem. Thus, simile is a part of the process of Naming, marking and connecting the successive foci of the speculative perception.

There are cases in this poetry where the next movement of the perception, that is, the next simile connection is possible to anticipate, or at least, to accept as the most natural. This expected simile resembles an anticipated rhythm in music when we listen with complete concentration. It happens when the poem deals with some recurrent patterns of experiences. The poem outlines the pattern of that experience, that is, the main structure. We feel at home with the direction the poem is taking us through the simile-branching of the experience. It seems that the poem outlining the recognizable pattern the experience conjures up the common dynamics of happening of experiences which leads toward the anticipation. Here are some examples in the poem "Home for Thanksgiving" where a simile relationship introduces a new aspect of the experience. The man "brings himself home" like:

I bring myself back avoiding in silence
 Like a ship in a bottle.
 I bring my bottle....

The dark would have turned up other
 Poverties, I bring myself
 Back like a mother cat transferring her only
 kitten...²⁴

Oh misery, misery, misery,
 You fit me from head to foot like a good grade suit
 of longies
 Which I have worn for years and never want to take
 off....

In the first example, the simile, beside the feeling of ineptness and discomfort of the speaker, suggests one of his weaknesses--drinking. The next line: "I bring my bottle," results from the simile in the preceding one.

The simile in the second example, suggests the spiritual impoverishment and loneliness of this speaker. After speculating on what would have happened if he'd established family ties with one of "those good women," the simile of "a mother cat" reinforces the bitter irony towards possible happiness with marriage. The irony is addressed to himself, "bringing himself like a mother cat her only kitten."

In the third example, the misery compared with "grade suit of longies" gives a hint of two possible reasons for his misery: his longings and his emotional inability to meet the longings with any fulfilling realization of them. Thus, in all the examples, the comparisons (the similes) give hints of different aspects of his character and his situation.

In the poem "The Saint of the Uplands" a simile appears in the first line: "Their prayers still swarm on me like

lost bees" does not take us outside of the experience. Instead it makes the connection of "sweetness" and Christian love-grace. The simile in the last line of the last stanza of the poem:

...And over
My dry bones they build their churches, like wells.
is a development of the idea of the second stanza, that "vision," the understanding of the people (whose "faces were hard crusts like their farms") will come as water:

In the high barren
The light loved us.
Their faces were hard crusts like their farms
And the eyes empty, where vision
Might not come otherwise
Than as water.²⁵

It seems that the similes in this example are more than simple comparisons. The new concepts they introduce provide for the development of the experience of the poem. The simile in the last stanza tells us how much this people understood of the teachings of the saint, building their churches ("like wells") over his "dry bones," while their vision (from the second stanza) was to come "as water." So, the simile "churches like wells," does not come outside the surroundings of the poem. At the same time, the element of comparison of "churches" with "wells" is still present and from that side of the simile suggests that "the churches" are spiritual wells, giving life to the spirit as water does to the body. Another example of simile embodying the main structure of the poem is the last part of the poem "Lemuel's Blessing:"

Let my ignorance and my failings
 Remain far behind me like tracks made in a wet season,
 At the end of which I have vanished,
 So that those who track me for their own twisted
 ends
 May be rewarded only with ignorance and failings.
 But let me leave my cry stretched out behind me
 like a road
 On which I have followed you
 And sustain me for my time in the desert
 On what is essential to me.²⁶

Here "ignorance and failings like tracks" is a part of the route--the prayer, the voice undertakes listing the things "to be spared from." Later on, (line 6), his "cry," is compared with a road. "The cry" actually is the prayer, "stretched behind" as he continues to name (list) the things. We see an organic structure in the stanza developed through connections among the comparisons (similes). We can see that the first simile is developed further through the second one: "the tracks" are left on the same road-cry-prayer.

Another interesting example of simile entering the structure of the poem, is the poem "The Ships Are Made in Silence," where the comparison, based on the physical resemblance of heart and harbour, gradually develops to culmination in the emotional charge which ends up with a cry:

I have left you my hope to remember me by,
 Though now there is little resemblance.
 At this moment I could believe in no change,
 The mast perpetually
 Vacillating between the same constellations,
 The night never withdrawing its dark virtue
 From the harbor shaped as a heart,
 The sea pulsing as a heart,
 The sky vaulted as a heart,
 Where I know the light will shatter like a cry
 Above a discovery:
 Emptiness...²⁷

There is a movement inward and outward of the experience in these lines with the useage of similes, one after the other in lines (7), (8), and (9). First, the shape of "the harbor" compared with "a heart" then "the water pulsing as a heart," and "the sky valuted as a heart," is development of a series of similes, one coming out of the other: since "the harbor" looks like a heart, "water" being part of "the harbor" pulses like a heart. This is the outward movement of the experience. However, heart is always associated with emotions. The physical reality of the stanza, everything resembling a heart, produces the progressive emotional movement, the movement inward, which ends up with a cry. That is, the similes, as they come one after the other, produce emotional charge in the poem besides structuring it through the physical images they develop.

"Finally" is a poem where the similes, developed as whole images, become integral parts of the experience, especially the last stanza:

Come. As a man who hears a sound at the gate
 Opens the window and puts out the light
 The better to see out into the dark,
 Look, I put it out.²⁸

"As" in the first line introduces the simile. But, the last line tells us that the voice in the poem in enacting the comparison already. So, the simile is not just a comparison, it is already presentation of the action. Thus, simile here enters the structure of the experience as action. The simile comparison is turned into action. The simile here names the experience, that is, develops its structure.

In the last stanza of "Now and Again" the simile, on the basis of simple comparison of physical resemblance of two different objects, brings about the final and maybe the most important part of the experience of the poem:

The stars that came with us this far have gone back.
The wings of the migrants wake into autumn, and
 through
The hammered leaves the walnuts
Drop to the road and open:
Here is the same brain of our extinct summer.
Already it remembers nothing.²⁹

Even in a case like this, where the relationship between the "walnut--brain" is technically a metaphorical transformation, the relationship still has the force of simile because both objects appear in the poem along with the sign of their connection. This poetry leaves the connective sign so that the experience does not appear created but followed the way it happens in reality. After the speaker notices the falling walnuts on the road, the association of walnuts as human brains springs in the mind. The poem leaves the sign of such comparison, the column in this case:(:). If metaphor was called a tool of creation which God forgot in the body of His creation (the man), then simile is the tool which in the process of Naming, the poem leaves on purpose, because the tool is part of the creation (the poem).

Simile reinforces the idea of Naming since it connects different aspects of the speculative experience without breaking the idea of reality transferred in the poem, as opposed to reality re-created, changed, by metaphor. Through

this connection, simile expands and develops the organic structure of the experience. Since the experience is a speculation the structure of the speculation is developed through associative connections. The poem reveals these connections by simile ("is like," "as"). Thus, the poem names the process of speculation, the epistemological urge to discover, the experience in order to comprehend it. Simile names the speculation. By simile the objects enter the poem as what they are: "the walnut" is "the walnut falling" which only reminds the speculative voice of "a brain." "The door" enters the poem as a concrete object, "a door," which as the poem develops gains some more abstract meanings. Simile names the objects of the experience.

So, simile is like an extension hand of Naming (to use a simile), connecting and/or spinning the fibers of the texture of the experience.

Some of the poems start with simile at the beginning and develop the same simile throughout the whole poem, till the poem becomes one whole simile. It is a common characteristic of the shorter poems. It bears some similarities with the conceit in the Metaphysical poetry except that the conceit is based on metaphorical relationships between the compared objects. The compared objects usually are not normally connected in reality so metaphors in Metaphysical poetry are somehow strained and produce effects like bizarreness. Merwin's developed similes share the wit of the Metaphysical conceit. Here are some examples where the similes resemble the idea of conceit as a

comparison developed in a whole image:

("Separation")

Your absence has gone through me
Like thread through a needle.
Everything I do is stitched with its color.³⁰

or the poem "As by Water:"

Oh
Together
Embracing departure
We hoisted our love like a sail

And like a sail and its reflection
However
We move and wherever
We shall be divided as by water
Forever forever
Though
Both sails shudder as they go
And both prows lengthen the same sorrow

Till the other elements
Extend between us also.³¹

From the line "We hoisted our love like a sail" we follow a whole image expanding from the comparison of "love like a sail." The lovers will be like "the sail" and "its" reflection, so close and still separated, or so similar but still separate.

Very often the simile growing into a complex image, that is, developing into a whole stanza, and throughout the whole poem, engenders metaphors inside it. The poem "In the Gorge" is an example where the main image developed out of the simile (in the second and the third lines) is actually the whole poem. However, the first line "Lord of the bow" suggests a metaphorical interpretation of the whole simile-image since "bow" with its multiple meanings

suggests among others, the "bow of the broken bridge." The "hands are groping for each other" as if striving to re-establishes "the bow" of the broken bridge. So, "the lord of the bow" can acquire many meanings, that is, it can be different things. In this way, the whole poem acquires the metaphorical interpretations.

Lord of the bow,
Our jagged hands
Like the ends of a broken bridge
Grove for each other in silence
Over the loose water.
Have you left us nothing but your blindness?³²

Trying to find the border line between metaphor and simile we enter another significant domain of Merwin's poetry. Each analysis of particular poems unavoidable leads to the discovery that it is always possible for metaphors to "cluster" on the developed images of this poetry. Metaphors breed inside these images (often based on similes). To illustrate this I will quote some parts of the poem "The Nails:"

I gave you sorrow to hang on your wall
Like a calendar in one color.
I wear a torn place on my sleeve.
It isn't as simple as that.

Here it is interesting to see the connection between the verb "hang" in the first line and "a torn place on my sleeve" in the third line. Somehow it seems easy to connect something "torn" with something "hanging." In that case, a metaphorical interpretation springs, the "torn place," as a metaphor for sorrow. Actually, it is in a sense a cause-effect relation: torn place on someone's clothes can be

of despair, disgrace, sorrow. The torn place is like a torn spirit in sorrow.

But at this moment
 When the nails are kissing the fingers good-bye
 And my only
 Chance is bleeding from me,
 When my one chance is bleeding....³³

There is a connection between "nails" and "bleeding" which produce the particular emotional state the poem reaches in this stanza. If the connection is not completely metaphorical, then there is suggestion of lost chance bleeding like "bitten nails."

So we might say that metaphor unavoidably breeds in the thick texture of the images. However, as we have seen in the examples, those images are developed mostly on simile comparisons. The relationship between the object and the object of comparison is still visible in the poem. Such poetry is mainly based on poetic "straightforwardness."

Another significant characteristic of Merwin's poetry in relation to the idea of Naming is personification. The voice of the poem usually apostrophizes animals and inanimate objects, or they "talk" themselves in direct speech. Where they are not apostrophized or do not talk themselves, they are referred to as alive beings with some human characteristics. It is more precise to say that some aspects of the life dynamics of human beings are ascribed to them. The idea of Naming is reaffirmed with personification since animals and objects apostrophied, and "speculating" themselves, are called into the presence of the poem as what

they represent. They are named as what they are. Here is an example of objects, "things" speculating on some aspects of their existence in relation to man:

("Things")

Possessor

At the approach of winter we are there.
 Better than friends, in your sorrows we take no
 pleasure,
 We have none of our own and no memory but yours.
 We are the anchor of your future.
 Patient as a border of beggars, each hand holding
 out its whole treasure,

We will be all the points on your compass.
 We will give you interest on yourself as you deposit
 yourself with us.

Be a gentleman: you acquired us when you needed
 us,
 We do what we can to please, we have some beauty,
 we are
 helpless,
 Depend on us.³⁴

The ironic tone of this poem reaches a pathetic moment in the line where a simile appears: "Patient as a border of beggars, each hand holding out its whole treasure." The simile reveals the bareness and the futility of striving for things.

The poem "A Flea's Carrying Words" is an example of speculation of nonhuman being on its "existence."

A flea is carrying a bag of diseases
 and he says as he goes
 these I did not make myself
 we don't all have the same gifts
 beginning isn't everything
 I don't even know who made them
 I don't know who'll use them
 I don't use them myself
 I just do what is in front of me
 as I'm supposed to

I carry them
 nobody likes me
 nobody wants to change places with me
 but I don't mind
 I get away
 bag and all
 something needs me
 everything needs me
 I need myself
 and fire is my father 35

As we can see from these examples, when the speech is given to objects and animals, they follow the speculative mode as the human voice does, in this poetry. Speculating on the place of their existence in man's world, they outline the general patterns of their existence (their actions) by which they define their place in the world. In the poem "Things," "the things" talk with an ironic tone about their negative action, the place they carve into the human mind. We can see also that the place they have in the human world is their purposiveness. "The flea" is carrying diseases and from his speculation we can see that certain aspects of his dynamics of life resemble human actions. "The flea carries diseases" as man carries, for example, prejudices, fears, which can spread mental "diseases" (irony, hatred, intrigues). The line: "We don't all have the same gifts" can be applied both to humans and to insects. On the other hand, the flea's speculation draws lines of the essential pattern of his existence. Actually, we find that man also has a place in the flea's life: he can be a subject of diseases. In other words, the poem names and orders the patterns of existence of the human and the nonhuman world. Thus, it reveals the points where these worlds overlap

sharing the same dynamics of life. The poem picks up this connectedness of reality to reconstruct it as thick texture where everything appears connected. This connectedness is not a Christian belief in the common origin of all things. It is the intersecting of the same movements of the dynamism of man, animal, and inanimate objects. The dynamics of each reveals something about the existence of the other. We can see that this poetry does not establish this relatedness by metaphor, in which case, the flea would stand for something else (a type of human character). The poem names this connectedness naming the essential patterns of existence of both worlds (human and nonhuman).

These are some examples of the nonhuman world talking and revealing some common human routes of action. In the short poem "Inscription for a Burned Bridge" the route the bridge is taking ("going in with the river") suggests the same route of humans going in the river of life towards the end, towards death. The route towards destruction is shared by the humans and nonhuman objects. Also, the destruction of the bridge is a human action destroyed by human action. In a way, the destruction of the bridge is a point of intersection of the route of human and nonhuman dynamics of existence. In this respect, personification names the relatedness which exists in reality.

Not your defeats, no.
 I have gone in with the river.
 I will serve you no longer but you may follow me.³⁶

In the poem "One Way" the man follows his hunger:

Oh hell, there once again hunger
 Gets up in the middle of a meal and without
 A word departs. I go after: what
 Would I be without her?

"Her" departure becomes a route of his sufferings:

Night, I am
 As old as pain and I have
 No other story...

I had not yet had my fill
 Of dissatisfaction. My mouth
 Works like a heart. More and more
 I get like shadows; I find out
 How they hate.³⁷

With other words, paths of human action are revealed in the essential aspects of the existence of the inanimate world. In the poem "Tool" the striking and "the speaking" of the hammer reveals different human situations:

then all at once
 a hammer rises from under a lid
 and shakes off its cold family

 its one truth is stirring in its head
 order order saying

The existence of the inanimate object ("the hammer") is conceivable through its action, which is purposiveness. Its purposiveness actually reveals a human action (the law). It also reveals some actions which are connected with any law or order, like human desire for dominance, ruling tyranny, stubbornness: "its one truth stirring in its head/order, order saying." The first line also suggests the point of overlapping of the two worlds where the tool ("the hammer") and the humans, belong: "If it is invented, it will be used/maybe not for some time." This line can refer to "the law" as well as to "the tool." The end of the poem actually

shows that point mentioning the law (human action) functioning among the inanimate objects ("nail").

and a surprised nail leaps
 into darkness
 that a moment before had been nothing

 waiting
 for the law³⁸

Thus, the poem with personification names the interaction between the two worlds: first, the human invents the hammer which exists through its purposiveness, through its actions; then the hammer and its purposiveness exist independently, as symbols of different human actions.

Through personification the hammer becomes an abstract concept, a tool. It is a part of broader abstract concept: "inanimate objects." Actually, the personification of "the hammer" is possible on the basis of this conceptualization. It is "the tool" speaking in the poem, the inanimate object, then, a particular concrete hammer. In this respect, personification implies conceptualization.

Conceptualization as such is Naming, or one aspect of the concept of Naming, naming the objects in the poem. In this case, it is giving an abstract name to a concrete object ("hammer"-"tool"). Also, through conceptualization/personification, the object enters the poem as a name representing what it is.

With the idea of conceptualization, through personification, the conceptualized object, gains some independence from the relationship with humans. Once an abstract concept, the object can be apostrophized, thus, given a separate

existence, or recognized as a separate existence. The example of the poem "Old Flag" illustrates this:

his shoes

and they run to him laughing
as though he had been away
they dance at his feet as though
before a throne³⁹

In this example "the shoes" appear with separate existence. They have gotten their freedom from the man's existence by being personified (they "laugh," "dance"). In order to be personified, they are conceptualized, since personification ascribes human characteristics first to the concept: inanimate objects, "shoes," then to particular concrete "shoes." With this conceptualization they are abstracted from concreteness; they represent their "shoeness." Thus, they can be addressed, apostrophized as free, separate from humans.

Another example of Naming through conceptualization and abstraction of the inanimate object is "The Night of the Shirts" where the voice apostrophizes a "pile of shirts." The apostrophe is possible, since the objects apostrophized are seen existing separately from humans.

Oh pile of white shirts who is coming
to breathe in your shapes to carry your numbers
to appear
what hearts
are moving toward their garments here
their days
what troubles breathing between arms

The paths of "the shirts" intersect with humans. They bear "the wounds" of the existence with humans. Being piled

they are like a row of people looking upwards to the gods.
They share the same gods:

and we exist from within
eyes of the gods⁴⁰

Again, in this poem Naming happens. The inanimate objects are called into the presence of the poem as concepts, being addressed, apostrophized. This way, their existence is named as separate.

Not only objects but abstract concepts too can be named as living beings which "talk" to humans from perspectives (the place) humans have given them. Concepts, like "habits," "simplicities," concepts of time ("the day") having special significance for humans are brought to "life" by personification.

Abstract concepts enter the poem with independence of their own; they are already abstract names, free from concreteness. Thus, they have intrinsically the independence, so they can be called by their names. A good example of an abstract concept seen with separate existence, which from its own side affects humans, is the poem "Habits:"

Even in the middle of the night
they go on handing me around
but it's dark and they drop more of me
and for longer

then they hang onto my memory
thinking it's theirs

even when I'm asleep they take
one or two of my eyes for their sockets
and they look around believing
that the place is home⁴¹

Habits can alienate humans from reality building up certain stupor on human perception of reality. The human being can wake up sometimes from the stupor, feeling completely alienated from what looked like home.

Abstract concepts are, thus, re-named entering the poem as personified names. By personification they are referred to as separate realities with their own dynamics of movement. An example which shows the dynamics of the separate existence of a purely abstract concept, is the poem "Something I Have Not Done:"

Something I've not done
is following me
I haven't done it again and again
So it has many footsteps
like a drumstick that's grown and never been used

"Something I've Not Done" is only a concept which doesn't even have a particular name. The poem following its dynamics of existence names its existence in the human world. Its separate existence is recognized and personified, thus named:

In the late afternoon I hear it come closer
at times it climbs out of a sea
onto my shoulders
and I shake it off
losing one more chance⁴²

"Simplicity" as an abstract concept appears in some poems ("Vocations," "To Where We Are") named in the same manner by personification:

We come on to where we are, laughing to think
Of the Simplicities in their shapeless hats
With a door so they can sit outside it

I hope I may say
Our neighbors⁴³

This poetry "separates" even the parts of the human body addressing them as separate entities. In the poem "For Saying That It Won't Matter," the speculative voice talks with its bones:

You are voyaging now through the half light of my
life
let us talk of this while the wind is kind
and the foam rustling on your bows
hear me I am going to leave you...⁴⁴

Often hands appear in this poetry "doing things." Abstracted from the human being they "follow" their own route:

("Span")

I know hands that leapt from childhood to old age
Youth was never for them however they held it...⁴⁵

Personification is one of the way of substantiating the idea of Naming besides speculation and simile. As we have seen, all three of the discussed devices reaffirm the concept of Naming reality opposed to re-creating reality through artistic change and/or distortion. All three of them substantiate different aspects of Naming and in different manners. Through speculation the experience is presented as a flow of thoughts, choosing Naming as a way of conveying that speculative pattern in the poem; that is, the poem names the speculation as it happens. Here the aspect of Naming reality as opposed to metaphorically re-creating reality, finds expression. Simile names reality structuring the experience as an organic unity. It is a

way of expanding and developing the experience through connections (similes) which do not imply change of reality as the equation with metaphor does. Personification names reality through conceptualization, with which concrete names become abstract concepts since in the process of ascribing human characteristics to inanimate objects they are referred to as: "inanimate objects" first, and then as concrete, particular objects.

NOTES

¹ W.S. Merwin, The Moving Target (New York: Atheneum, 1979), p. 32.

² W.S. Merwin, The Lice (New York: Atheneum, 1979), p. 62.

³ King James Version (New York: American Bible Society, n. d.).

⁴ Northrop Frye distinguishes three phases in language: metaphorical, metonymical and descriptive. The main premise for such distinction is epistemological. The way and the scope of comprehension and knowledge of the world is reflected in language. For example, the metaphorical stage of language reflects "...relatively little emphasis on a clear separation of subject and object: the emphasis falls rather on the feeling that subject and object are linked by a common power or energy...;" Northrop Frye, The Great Code (New York: Brace Jovanovich, 1982), p.6.

⁵ Ortega y Gasset, The Dehumanization of Art and Notes on the Novel, trans. Helene Weyl (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1948), p. 24.

⁶ Frye, The Great Code, p. 11.

⁷ Rainer Maria Rilke, Duino Elegies and the Sonnets to Orpheus, trans. A. Poulin, Jr. (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1975), p. 89.

⁸ Kenneth Burke, A Grammar of Motives (New York; Prentice-Hall, 1945), p. 506.

⁹ Ortega y Gasset, The Dehumanization of Art, p. 33.

¹⁰ Federico Garcia Lorca, Poems, trans. Stephan Spender and J.L. Gili (London: The Dolphin, 1939), p. 59.

¹¹ W.S. Merwin, The Carrier of Ladders (New York: Atheneum, 1980), p. 11.

¹² "Action" is to be understood as life. Francis Fergusson in his study The Idea of a Theater develops the concept of "action" as an analogical concept understood in reference to different actions in particular plays. However, his concept is mainly developed on the basis of a distinction between "plot" and "action" which Aristotle makes in his "Theory of Poetry and Fine Art:"

'The plot is the imitation of the action--for by plot I here mean the arrangement of the

incidents...But most important of all is the structure of the incidents. For tragedy is an imitation, not of men, but of an action and of life, and life consists in action, and its end is a mode of action, not a quality.'--p. 25.

Francis Fergusson, The Idea of a Theater (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1949), p. 229.

13 The Moving, p. 59.

14 W.S. Merwin, Writings to an Unfinished Accompaniment (New York: Atheneum, 1973), p. 31.

15 William Pitt Root, Striking the Dark Air for Music (New York: Atheneum, 1973), p. 54.

16 The Moving, p. 72.

17 Writings, p. 33.

18 The Carrier, p. 65.

19 Martin Heidegger, Existence and Being, trans. Douglas Scott, R. F.C. Hull and Alan Crick (Chicago: Henry Regnery Comp., 1949), p. 304.

20 The Moving, p. 31

21 The Moving, p. 34.

22 The Moving, p. 39.

23 The Carrier, p. 129.

24 The Moving, p. 3.

25 The Moving, p. 17.

26 The Moving, p. 8.

27 The Moving, p. 23.

28 The Moving, p. 22.

29 The Moving, p. 32.

30 The Moving, p. 9.

31 The Moving, p. 11.

32 The Moving, p. 9.

33 The Moving, p. 18.

- 34 The Moving, p. 12.
- 35 Writings, p. 75.
- 36 The Moving, p. 13.
- 37 The Moving, p. 37.
- 38 Writings, p. 26.
- 39 Writings, p. 23.
- 40 The Carrier, p. 65.
- 41 Writings, p. 28.
- 42 Writings, p. 25.
- 43 The Moving, p. 61.
- 44 Writings, p. 89.
- 45 Writings, p. 102.

CHAPTER TWO

TONE - THROUGH THE SPECULATIVE RHYTHM

Tone is probably one of the most difficult characteristics to define. We can speak of the tone of a poem and talk about the metrical pattern, the choice of words, punctuation, line breaks, the manner of expression, and we still might expect to be asked what do we mean by "tone?" It seems that the reason for such response is the lack of one single and precise definition. Also, this term used in different areas of artistic performance (music, painting) is finally a result of a combination of characteristics--a presence of some, or absence of others. Even though tone has more than one definition, they are all very general and do not list all the characteristics by which it is defined. The definition of tone in the domain of language and literature of The Oxford English Dictionary: "a particular style in discourse or writing which expresses the person's sentiment or reveals his character," will be used as a starting point since it answers the first question why tone is chosen as an important characteristic of Merwin's poetry. The primary reason is that tone as a characteristic of the aesthetic is a result of the personal epistemology which from its side reflects "the person's sentiment or reveals his character," as the definition says. Talking about tone is a way of giving testimony to the importance of epistemology behind aesthetics. When we discussed Naming, we mentioned that Naming as an aesthetic principle in Merwin's poetry reflects his personal epistemology; namely,

speculation substantiating the idea of Naming, reflects his epistemology. Thus, it might be assumed that talking about tone reflected from the same epistemology we will be repeating the same issue. However, since the starting definition of tone does not cover all the characteristics which define the tone of Merwin's poetry we must find them and decide on them in the poetry itself. This way we will be able to see and discuss further Merwin's poetry in general given expression by these characteristics.

The characteristics important for defining the tone of this poetry are: 1) rhythm, 2) modes of poetic expression, and 3) punctuation, or lack of punctuation. Even though they all strike us as very general, the analysis of each of them will concentrate on some specific points.

To start with, the rhythm seems the most natural way of opening up the broad issue of Merwin's epistemology reflected in his poetry.

Why is it that epistemology is most closely connected with rhythm? As we have mentioned before "breathing," "breath," as a kind of surrogate metaphor of poetry is closely connected with rhythm. The rhythm of poetry is like the rhythm of breathing in speech. Each poetic experience, emotional or intellectual, which affects the poet instills its own rhythm. Joy or any kind of pleasant excitement, for example, is reflected in the speed of language. There is no point of making an assumption that there are universal ways of reflecting emotions in speech and language. But, the rhythm of a particular emotion meeting the

temperament and the intellect of the poet, or the speaker, leaves traces in his/her poetry or speech. It is enough to say that in speech as well as in poetry the language chooses ways of revealing the rhythm of an emotional or intellectual experience. Also, we will not go so far as to explore the correspondence between some biological rhythms of the body (e.g., the heart beat) and the rhythm of the experiences, as some literary critics have attempted. However, as an acknowledgement of this correspondence it will be interesting to quote Kenneth Burke's notion on this issue:

Systole and diastole, alternation of the feet in walking, inhalation and exhalation, up and down, in and out, back and forth, such are the types of distinctly motor experiences "tapped" by rhythm. Rhythm is so natural to the organism that even a succession of uniform beats will be interpreted as a succession of accented and unaccented beats. The rhythm of a page, in setting up a corresponding rhythm in the body, creates marked degrees of expectancy, or acquiescence.¹

So, the rhythm of the poetic experiences are reflected in the poetic language. This statement leads us back to the initial step we took when we suggested the relation between the epistemology and rhythm. Since the experience (the subject-matter) in Merwin's poetry is speculation or the experiences are presented in a speculative mode, the rhythm of the language reflecting the speculation reflects the epistemology.

In order to explore further how the rhythm of the experience (speculation) is reflected in the language we should start with rhythms of emotions in Merwin's poetry.

In the speculative mode of presentation of the

experience, the emotions are part of the speculation. In Merwin's poetry we rarely find an outburst of emotions. They are quiet, calm. They are "speculative" in the sense that we do not find the first flame. The voice in the poem through speculation reveals their effects on him. Consequently, these kinds of emotions naturally choose their rhythm in language. That is, epistemology chooses its rhythm in language. The rhythm of language reflects epistemology. In order to illustrate how the rhythm of the language reflects the epistemological process we should point to some examples. Let us look at the first and the third part of the poem "The Piper:"

I

It is twenty years
 Since I first looked for words
 for me now
 whose wisdom or something would stay me
 I chose to
 trouble myself about the onset
 of this
 it was remote it was grievous
 it is true I was still a child....

III

It has taken me till now
 to be able to say
 even this
 it has taken me this long
 to know what I cannot say
 where it begins
 like the names of the hungry
 Beginning
 I am here
 please
 be ready to teach me
 I am almost ready to learn²

In the first part, the irregular variation of short lines slows the general rhythm. Ending unexpectedly in

the middle of the statements, the short lines reflect the speculative mind lingering undecidedly on certain points before taking the next step. Between line (3), "for me now," and the next one, "whose wisdom or something would stay me," there is a longer break which suggests a break in the train of thought. The following line, "I choose to," also ending abruptly in the middle of the statement, slows the rhythm, revealing a process of speculation which is slow. In Part III the break between lines (2) and (3), "to be able to say/even this/" prolongs the silence which usually comes with line breaks, because they come unexpectedly in the middle of the statement. Lines (8), (9), (10), are one-word lines which come one after the other, considerably slowing the rhythm and thus revealing an emotional oppressiveness at the end of the poem. Such oppressiveness starts with the simile in lines (6) and (7): since "a list" of "the names of the hungry" is inconceivable, the beginning of what "cannot be said" is impossible to find. The following lines breaking the rhythm slowly suggest the heavy feeling of the futility of finding the beginning of what cannot be expressed in words. Also, "the hungry" thus introduced reinforces the idea of a "hunger" to know, to learn about the experience. So, the rhythm of the speculative mode of presenting the experience (in this poem, the speculation on the poet's art, his aesthetic) is reflected in the rhythm of language. The lines follow the speed of thinking and emotionally reexperiencing the experience.

There are many poems in Merwin's poetry where the rhythm of the language, reflecting the rhythm of certain emotions, gives also expression of interjections and silences, the mere rhythm of breathing, which accompanies certain emotions. The poem "The Calling Under the Breath" is an interesting example where, as the title itself suggests, a certain invocation of silence and outcry is suggested. These invocations of crying and silence are the accompaniments of a certain feeling of loneliness, a search for somebody. The first silence comes after the second stanza of the poem. After the silence one isolated "Where are you" comes, which is not only technically isolated from the previous and the following stanzas, but also rhythmically. It comes as an unexpected abrupt break in the rhythm. This stanza-line is actually the cry. Thus, the silence before it comes naturally.

Silence runs through the birds
 their shadows freeze
 where are you³

After "the silence" is mentioned, it is pronounced through the rhythm - the silence "happens" after it. "The cry," however, is "calling under the breath," as the title suggests. Thus, in the first line of the following stanza the calling, the cry, is muffled: "Where are you where are you." The repetition of the call, (the cry) in this line is like a whisper, murmur; the echo of the cry. It is not a loud, romantic cry; it is a quiet call coming from desperation

which the voice tries to suffocate in the awareness of the futility in attempting to bring somebody back on a miraculous "sail," as the poem says. The mountains which approach each other like "sails" are also "sails from windless kingdom." Any movement or change of the situation is impossible. Here, again, an emotional charge is reflected in the general rhythm of the poem. "The call under the breath" shakes and interrupts the initial, slower flow of the lines, leaving its sound, and the silence accompanying it, in the language.

The previous examples illustrate how rhythms of certain emotions are reflected through corresponding rhythms in the language. We saw that even the breathing, the silence, or the cry of an emotionally charged voice in the poem are reflected in the language. This reflection of the experience in the language sheds some light on the connection between recognizing the experience (epistemology) and expressing the experience (aesthetics). The rhythm of language expresses the rhythm of the experience. This expression in language is cognition of the experience at the same time, because only in this way will it be defined, given a name, or its impact on the reader discussed.⁴ At the same time each poem revealing the attempt, the struggle, to know, to discover what has happened, is happening, will be happening, embodies the epistemology, the subject-matter of the poem. That constant urge to know, leaves "impressions" on the language. The rhythm of recognizing, discovering, thinking about the experience and the emotions aroused with this speculative process, correspond to rhythmical variations

of the language. The poem "Who it is" giving the phases of such an epistemological process: from the actual happening (the first part of the poem) to the questions which are raised from the speculation upon it:

On the upper slope
 the moon
 smokes through the woods
 someone is running there
 silently waving
 someone's father
 not my father
 no and not his father the drunk
 no and not his
 father the one that was murdered
 no it is the first one
 I don't know
 it is his father
 it is everyone I don't know
 it is his father

why
 is he running there

why is he running on the mountain

why is he waving why do I
 not hear him
 why do I not know him
 why do I not know him why are they there

everywhere they have seen
 their moon rising⁵

The urge of the speaker to recognize the experience "shapes" the rhythm of the lines in the middle of the first part. The guesses, then, the negation of the guesses and the repetition of the phrase "I don't know," speed up the rhythm because frustration, impatience to find the answers is produced. The rhythm "loosens" in indifference and confusion in the following lines: "it is his father/it is everyone I don't know." In the second part of the poem

the questioning still continues. There is a silence between the two parts, as though the speaker pauses confused, waiting for the articulation of different questions to spring from his mind: "Why/is he running there/." Then again another silence before the next question; "Why is he running on the mountain."

Repetition of some words produces intensity in the language. The rhythm is fast, the repeated words "leap" among the lines breaking in the middle of the statements. This leap of repeated words is like a nervous impulse reflected in the language. It appears as if it couldn't be controlled. In the poem "Fear," the repeated word "fear" appears after each phrase, speeding up the already fast rhythm. This rhythm reveals a stream of consciousness running fast, threatened, oppressed by the feeling of fear.

Fear
 there is
 fear in fear the name the blue and green walls
 falling of and numbers fear the veins that
 when they were opened fear flowed from and
 these forms it took a ring a ring a ring
 a bit of grass green swan's down gliding on
 fear into fear and the hatred and something
 in everything and it is my death's
 disciple leg and fear none would not
 have back those lives again and their fear as
 he feared he would say but he feared more he
 did not fear more he did fear more
 in everything it is there a long time....

Even though the effect produced suggests an irrational outburst of feeling, the poem still is a speculation on fear. It starts by introducing the topic "fear" (the first line) and develops it further by covering many aspects of

fear. At the end this long poem says:

You either clearly and from the beginning
 could ever again because from the beginning
 there is fear in everything and it is
 me and always was in everything it
 is me⁶

If we can say that the rhythm of a poem follows the rhythm of breathing of the one who experiences certain emotions, it is in this poem. The speaker is a consciousness wrapped up in intensive speculations on fear, under the burden of a fear which arises as the speculation touches different aspects of the subject (fear). The repetitious word "fear" produces hectic, uncontrollable speed in the language, because the lines run into the next one without break. The rhythm of the speculation and the emotions accompanying it (sometimes springing from it) leave their impression in language. As we saw with the example "Fear," the repetitions of the word "fear" and the line breaks produce certain dynamics of fear, seizing the reader more and more as the rhythm of the poem runs on.

Besides line breaks and repetitions, lack of punctuation also contributes to the general rhythm of the poem. With lack of punctuation, the reader him/herself chooses the way of the reading of the poem. The reading of the poem will depend mostly on effects certain elements produce on certain readers. The lack of punctuation contributes to a certain elasticity of the language of the poems, always vibrant, suggesting new shifts and turns in the meaning. Actually, in Merwin's poetry, since it uses a speculative

mode of expression, the lack of punctuation contributes in a sense to the freedom of the speculative mind to linger on subjects and objects. The speculative process is basically a process of discovering, or an attempt at discovery. Such attempt does not need necessarily to follow in an ordered manner. The lack of punctuation, the repetition of words or lines, the line breaks, all reveal the movement, the speed of the questioning mind, sometimes pausing in silence, sometimes digressing, sometime being confused. The lack of punctuation produces an effect of clustering of thoughts and feelings, since with the lack of punctuation we tend to read the lines without pausing. The thoughts and feelings come one after the other like an endless stream where a new thought bubbles before the previous one is finished. The lack of punctuation in the poem "Pilate" reveals a rhythm of speculation, an outpouring of thoughts coming one after the other without pauses:

Could I change myself my hands
 and their dreams a life of their own with its
 own heaven own future own windows
 washing can I change what they do before
 I am both for they will do it without me
 arm in arm with objects but to myself
 is not visible to these this man the life
 of its own without me its smoke its eagles
 and wooden fences and tonight the hands
 in the outer circles of the soldiers'
 corner fires later than the last meal
 gesturing is the reeling night washing
 in darkness afterwards will go home
 and the darkness will let itself down
 into their prayers ⁷

Digressions in speculative poems are also revealed in language. The lack of punctuation allows for these

digressions to "happen" since the ties among the lines are loose. For example, in "Teachers," after the first two parts, the third part comes with a loud cry which breaks the tone of the previous two parts:

Pain is in this dark room like many speakers
of a costly set though mute
as here the needle and the turning

the night lengthens it is winter
a new year

what I live for I can seldom believe in
who I love I cannot go to
what I hope is always divided

After this digression into pain, that is, after the loud cry, the tone of the poem resumes the calmer tone of the first two parts:

but I say to myself you are not a child now
if the night is longer remember your unimportance
sleep

then toward morning I dream of the first words
of books of voyages
some tellings that did not start by justifying

yet at one time it seems
had thought me ⁸

Thus the concentration (the clustering) of thoughts and feelings, flowing uninterrupted by punctuation, speeds up the rhythm at the same time a line break in the middle of a statement slows it down. Slowing down the rhythm leads sometimes into digressions of the lingering speculative mind. Speeding up the rhythm sometimes leads to dead points, silences which come unavoidably when emotions are aroused during speculation. Such characteristics circumscribe the

rhythm as speculative rhythm. This rhythm is an echo-answer to the rhythm of the speculation, reflecting the speed, the general movement of speculation. Speculative rhythm is the speed of the language employed by the speculative mind in the process of cognition of an experience that is reflected in the language of poetry. The speed of the language reflecting the speculative process reveals the relationship between the personal epistemology and the personal aesthetic. That is, the rhythm of cognition (epistemology) first corresponding to the rhythm of the poet's own temperament, intellect, finds expression in the rhythm of his/her language, poetry (aesthetic). The speculative rhythm of this poetry echoes, and consequently is a result of, the rhythm of speculation.

To proceed in following the characteristics which create the tone of this poetry we should focus on some forms of poetic expression. The meaning I have in mind when I use this formulation is: a form of poetic structure as are the structures of prayers or psalms. Merwin's poems do not strictly follow the structures of these forms. They convey the general tone of these forms. One way of conveying the general tone is through a repetition of some phrases or words, like in the poem "Psalm: Our Fathers:"

I am the son of the future but my own father
 I am the son of the future but where is my home
 and the black
 baptismal cup and the warning voice from the bushes
 under
 the kitchen window saying that they were not my
 parents

I am the son of a glass tombstone in a fresh plowed
 field whose
 furrows sit in rows studying the inscriptions of
 dew the sole
 name life tears as the sun rises but there are no
 more voices
 on that river³

The idea of repetition in psalm (as in the example quoted) is connected with the idea of Naming, the elements in the poetic experience. Listing, Naming, is to be understood more precisely as calling, naming the "I" in the poem "a son of joy," "a son of hope," "a son of peace," and so on. This calling of the I conforms to the basic idea of the simile relationship: somebody is like something. In that respect this calling is Naming since Naming is substantiated with simile (the first chapter). That is, the "I" is only connected with different objects of comparison without being totally equated with them. This calling-naming reveals again the speculative process. The subject of the poem reflects upon himself, his place in the world; Naming the existence and the different aspects of it. Also, the long list of what the I is (speculation), is directly opposite to what the I does. That is, the dynamism of now is replaced with the passive reflection. And, as we can see from all the examples of this type, the I is an active participant in the domain of reflection upon the experience. However, the I is not an observer who simply registers the experience; it is a speculatively active subject of the experience, emotionally and intellectually affected by the speculation. Similes, reveal the passive disposition of the "I" towards the experience where the "I" only compares

itself with something else. The poem "Second Psalm: The Signals" is a good example to illustrate the passive position of the "I." There is action in the beginning stanza:

When the ox-horn sounds in the buried hills
of Iceland
I am alone
My shadow runs back into me to hide
and there is not room for both of us
and the dread ...

But the subject (the "I") stands alone, isolated, as a still center of the experience which spins around it. Throughout the action happening around it, it reflects constantly upon itself, interjecting with the phrase "I am alone" and comparing itself with different things:

I am alone
as milk spilled in a street ...

I am alone
as the optic nerve of the blind ...

I am alone
as the hour of the stopped clock ...

I am alone
as one stone left to pray in the desert
after god has unmade himself
I am
I still am ...

I am alone
as a bow that has lost its nerve ...

I am alone as the sadness surrounding
what has long ministered to our convenience
alone as the note of the horn
as the human voice
saddest of instruments
as a white grain of sand falling in a still sea¹⁰
...

From these examples we can see that the reflective passive "I" through the listing-naming of the experience follows

through the listing-naming of the experience follows the speculative mode of presenting the experience, thus creating the speculative tone. The process the "I" follows is speculative, passive as opposed to an active response of "I" towards the experience where I would be less self-centered and less "self-conscious." Speculation is an action, too, but different from the dynamics of action we find for example, in Yeats' "Leda and the Swan," or Robert Frost's "Mending Wall," where speculation follows after the action is presented in the poem.

Repetitions and listing of things in prayers, poems, mythic stories, are intrinsic elements of these forms of expression. Thus, the general tone of these forms is intrinsically speculative. Merwin's poetry, dealing with experiences through speculation, chooses these forms as the most natural ones. Prayer contains the quality of emotional gradation through listing, naming things. In the prayer the subject reaches the point of emotional charge, desiring the things "to be." Prayer employed as a poetic form corresponds to the process of speculation of Merwin's poetry from which, during which, the same emotional gradation "happens" when the subject passively listing-naming, or comparing the things "to be" or "are like," reveals emotions like desire, pain from desire, and so on.

Prayer and psalm are also forms of monologue. Even though the subject of the prayer always addresses somebody to whom he/she prays (God), it is only the subject that speaks. Monologue bears some characteristics of speculation. The

mind unavoidably goes through a speculative process since there isn't an action-reaction situation between two as in dialogue. In prayer, the mind passively names-lists the experience opposite to actively-responding to somebody as in dialogue. Thus, prayer bears the idea of speculation being a form of monologue. Prayer as a poetic form in Merwin's poetry embodies the speculative tone of this poetry. In "Lemuel's Blessing," the voice of the poem in a form of prayer reveals the speculative experience of the poem:

From the ruth of kindness, with its licked hands;
 I have shifted baited fingers and followed
 Toward necessities which were not my own: it would
 make me
 An habitue of back steps, faithful custodian of
 fat sheep;¹¹

After each repetition of the prayful "Deliver Me" comes the long lists of experiences to be delivered from, recognized as wrong, painful, in other words, experiences already experienced and thought upon: "Lead me past the error at the fork of hesitation." So, the light of reflection constantly shines on the list of the named experiences of the prayer. The speculative tone never deserts the prayer, coming as an illumination, as if a gift to Lemuel for his blessings of "the wolf in the desert."

Besides in prayer and psalm, we find the same speculative tone conveyed in what we referred to as "myths" or "mytic stories" as forms of expression of this poetry. After "telling" each part of the story, the speaker interprets the story. However, he doesn't interpret the the metaphorical or the symbolical meanings of the story.

The speaker speculates on the story as on a past experience. "The Judgement of Paris" starts with an introduction to the myth with a didactive tone:

Long afterwards
the intelligent could deduce what had been offered
and not recognized
and they suggest that bitterness should be confined
to the fact that the gods chose for their arbiter
a mind and character so ordinary
albeit a prince

In each part of the "story" the speculative tone lingers among the lines, or is embodied in the presentation itself, as in the third part of the poem:

the one with the dark eyes spoke
and everything she said
he imagined he had once wished for
but in confusion and cowardice
the crown
of his father the crowns the crowns bowing to him
his name everywhere like grass
only he and the sea
trumpant
she made everything sound possible she was
dazzling she offered it to him
to hold high but what he saw
was the cruelty around her mouth
and her words of which he understood more
all said to him Take pride
Take Glory
you will suffer anyway

The italicized lines are the words of the feminine figure. Actually, they are the words of the narrator which interpret "what the words said to him," (to Paris). The italicized lines carry the main idea of the narrator's interpretation of the myth; or better, the main subject of his speculation, the absurdity of any struggle in life to attain things like power, wisdom, glory, pride, love:

... Take Wisdom
 take power
 you will forget anyway

... Take pride
 take glory
 you will suffer anyway

... Take
 her
 you will lose her anyway

This absurdity is a Camusian type of absurdity which doesn't negate life and the struggle. On the contrary, the acknowledgement of the absurdity of human life remobilizes all the creative power of humans to use the only given gift of nature, life. Paris in this sense is a real "absurd man" when he chooses love, sacrificing many things: his kingdom Troy, number of human lives, energy. Even though the words of the female giver of love, say:

they said to him Take
 her
 you will lose her anyway

he chooses love, sensing the consequences of his choice:

in the quiver of Paris's back, the head
 of the arrow for Achilles' heel
 smiled in its sleep¹²

The story of Paris told this way reveals an interpretation on the part of the narrator. The poem, starting with a deductive tone, follows with conclusions the interpretator has come upon after speculation on the story. If we dealt with speculative process going on in the poem in the previous examples, this example reveals a finished speculative process, the results of which are the narrator's attitude

towards the story; that is, his interpretation of the story. At the same time, this is movement towards a more active approach towards an experience. Also, the poem presents more action (the story itself). However, the narrator's interpretation of the story presupposes reflection, speculation, on the meaning of the story. Thus, the general tone of this poem is still speculative, defining the meanings of the experience (the story of Paris).

The poem "Edourd" is another example where speculation is the only action in the poem. The poem talks about an action which is going to be undertaken. However, apart from the tone of invitation to this action (not of the actual action happening), the voice resumes speculative tone through anticipation of what will happen in the future:

Edouard shall we leave
tomorrow
for Verdun again
shall we set out for the great days
and never be the same
never ...

Edouard shall be have gone
when the leaves come out
but before the heat
slows the grand marches
days like those
the heights, and the dying
at the right hand
sound a long horn
and here the bright handles
will fog over
things will break and stay broken
in the keeping of women
the sheep get lost
the barns
burn unconsolated in the darkness

The speculative voice goes even further and anticipates some of the questions he would have asked Edouard "had they

left." Also the voice anticipates the feelings of regret, suspicion; the changes which would have happened unavoidably. Immediately after the quotation where he (the voice) lists the anticipated changes during their absence, it goes on from anticipation to the assumption that the journey has already happened.

Edourd what would you have given
 not to go
 sitting last night in by the fire
 again
 but shall we be the same
 tomorrow night shall we not have gone
 leaving faces and nightingales
 As you know we will live
 and what never comes back will be
 you and me

This is an example which shows how speculation (anticipating the future actions) is the only action in the poem. That is, the real action is absent in the poem and only speculation of the action is present. The dynamics of now is here replaced by the dynamics of a future. Even though, the poem mentions definite, concrete actions, the speculative tone is still conveyed in the poem. The speculative tone finds its expression here in one-word lines like:

and never be the same
 never ...

time
 is what is left ...¹³

besides the general anticipatory disposition of the speaker towards the experience. These short lines reflect the anticipation of future actions in the poem, as if the voice takes short breaks to pause and summon its thoughts, to

continue with the speculations of "what would have happened" or "what is going to happen."

From this analysis of the tone of Merwin's poetry, it is clear that tone should be understood as the emotional stance in the poem which can be understood from an examination of a very general term (tone) which covers rhythm, punctuation and forms of poetic expression. The rhythm reflects the movement, the speed of the speculative process. It chooses the rhythm of the language in the poem as certain temperament chooses the speed of someone's speech. I have omitted all prosodic analysis of this poetry because there are no recurrent rhythmical patterns in Merwin's poems. The rhythm follows the rhythm of the speculative thought which is always diverse, accompanied by diffusion, digression, sudden breaks in the thought. Rhythm understood as revealing the speculative process underscores the speculative tone of the poetry. That is, the rhythm mainly creates the speculative tone. Generally, the tone is quiet and calm. Suppressed passions, frustrations, pain, and questions for which it is hard to find the answers are recurrent motifs of this poetry. The poetic voice reveals an awareness of irreconcilability of paradoxical issues in life.

NOTES

¹ Kenneth Burke, Counter-Statement (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1968), p. 140.

² The Carrier, p. 28.

³ The Carrier, p. 135.

⁴ A philosophically inclined reader would immediately comment that this is bringing up the ontological aspect of poetry and language as giving Being by Naming things. Even though the ontological aspect, incorporating an experience into language is present, what interests us here is the epistemological aspect of such incorporation.

⁵ Writings, p. 54.

⁶ The Carrier, pp. 83-88.

⁷ The Carrier, pp. 88-89.

⁸ The Carrier, p. 4.

⁹ The Carrier, p. 92.

¹⁰ The Carrier, pp. 99-100.

¹¹ The Moving, p. 7.

¹² The Carrier, pp. 22-24.

¹³ The Carrier, pp. 25-26.

CHAPTER THREE

RECURRENT THEMES AND MOTIFS

The tone of Merwin's poetry has a certain gnomic quality which requires further critical attention. Tone here will be approached from a second perspective--from the perspective of the recurrent themes and motifs and their expression in Merwin's poetry. The gnomic quality can thus be seen as a result of the choice of the themes and motifs. Such themes and motifs include questions the human being poses about the universe and his place in it; self-comprehension; concepts of gods, (God), divinities; emotions such as loneliness, pain, etc. However, Merwin's poetry does not provide answers to these ultimate questions. The nature of speculation in Merwin's poetry, not being conducive to ultimate conclusions, suggests the impossibility of final definitive answers. The poems present the speaker as confronting and striving to understand these questions. The speaker throughout the speculative process dwells on the multiple aspects of these issues, but does not propose any final answers or solutions.

Merwin's condensed expression of these themes and motifs often resembles aphoristic expression. This aphoristic quality contributes to the general gnomic quality of this poetry. In a few lines or stanzas Merwin's poetry can express complex, even intricate ideas upon which thousands of pages of philosophy, religion, etc., have been written.

Furthermore, Merwin's poetry can be seen as expression of "... situations typical and recurrent enough for men

to feel the need of having a name for them," as Kenneth Burke says in his essay "The Philosophy of Literary Form."¹ In other words, the recurrent themes and motifs of Merwin's poetry appear in the framework of concrete, human situations. These themes and motifs underlie different aspects of human existence. Thus, the gnomic tone of Merwin's poetry will be approached here through analyses of the themes and motifs in particular poems. This way we hope to avoid the trap of a limited critical interpretation of the gnomic quality as being only philosophical (or as any other such general categorization.)

Let us begin with the concept of pain (a prominent and recurrent feature of life). Pain, treated as a general concept, can be approached from various aspects (psychological, philosophical, etc.) We will approach pain as it appears in certain situations and circumstances that the poems provide. So, pain will be seen as a very general concept involving different areas of human life.

The poem "From a Series" as the title suggests, seems as if a part of a series of poems concerned with pain as recurrent in life, that is; pain considered and reconsidered, always affecting humans even when we think we have acquired some wisdom from having experienced it. The poem starts:

Division, mother of pain,
thus introducing one of the reasons for pain. The poem directs us to the recurrent nature of pain through the division into "months" and "days" of the year:

You might as well ask me why
 I come back to a month
 Alright
 Why do I and when I think
 There used to be eleven others
 At one time as they say and those
 Other days in the week ...

At the same time, the poem also suggests that no matter how often pain returns, the subject who goes through it never escapes its effects (the first stanza):

Division, mother of pain,
 Look at you bringing
 Your children up just as formerly
 And look at me back again
 In this former life,
 You've all grown but I haven't.

or later;

And as for me it was nice
 The way I sued to be able
 To forget between
 The last time I learned and the next time;²

There "pain" (coming from a "division") is treated philosophically, since the voice recognizes it and speculates on its recurrent nature. But, at the same time, we can see that the speculation on "pain" affects the voice emotionally. The poem begins by addressing "division" as "mother of pain," that is, the voice has reached a point when it has to confront the "pain" directly by addressing it. It is not merely a cold, reasoning voice talking about it.

In relation to "wisdom" and "pain" another poem, "The Different Stars," talks even more openly of that impossibility of transcending pain completely, even with the wisdom gained through experience:

what is it
 they say can turn even this into wisdom
 and what is wisdom if it is not
 now
 in the loss that has not left this place³

Pain is recognized as a recurrent element in the lives of humans, and the voice in the poem reveals an awareness of it ("pain") happening constantly. It is not the romantic view where the speaker in the poem experiences "the grand pain" with the intensity only he is able to reach. The outcome of this speaker experiencing pain is that pain is everywhere and it constantly appears in human lives. Bearing pain is joining the human universe, as the poem "Teachers," suggests:

Pain in this dark room like many speakers
 of a costly set though mute
 as here the needle and the turning...

but I say to myself you are not a child now
 if the night is long remember your unimportance
 sleep....

If "the pain" here is taken philosophically, that is, with reconciliation to its unavoidability and its universal impact on humanity, its psychological effects on the speaker are also present:

what I live for I can seldom believe in
 who I love I cannot go to
 what I hope is always divided⁴

Here for a moment the voice "shouts out" the pain carrying its voice in the next stanza with a more philosophical attitude towards the situation.

Thus, Merwin's treatment of pain opens a broad field of discussion of the concept from different aspects, which

lends proof of the limitless essence and capacity of poetry to reflect life from all its sides. In this respect, Merwin's poetry sums up a huge mass of complex reality in a few lines, or in a single stanza. Not surprisingly, some of the lines in the poetry appear as proverbial, capable of grasping the essence, the nucleus of that reality. A good example is the one-stanza poem "Economy."

No need to break the mirror
Here is the face shattered
Good for seven years of sorrow.⁵

Here, the mirror suggesting reflection, self-discovery, reflects the human face, self-analyzing and reflecting upon pain (sorrow). It is shattered by sorrow already; there's no need to break the mirror since the face is already broken ("shattered"), reflecting on pain: "good for seven years of sorrow," as the poem says. Merwin's brighter tone here comes from the humorous and ironic idea of sparing the mirror, that is, from the idea of "economy."

Another example of, if not brighter, then lighter, tone can be found in the poem "The Different Stars," where the lines: ..."that prizes less/as it receives than as it loses" suggest a contradictory aspect of emotions. In suffering from separation (as the poem suggests), the one who suffers pays the "high price" of his/her standards; that is, what is easily attainable diminishes in value for him/her, while what's easily lost gains more value.

pain having come from there
my love

I tend to think of division as the only evil
when perhaps it is merely my own

that unites
one day the veins one the arteries
that prizes less
as it receives than as it loses...⁶

The poem "The Chaff" is an example of a poem-proverb,
or a proverb developed in a poem:

Those who cannot love the heavens or the earth
beaten from the heavens or the earth
eat each other
those who cannot love each other
eat themselves
those who cannot love themselves
beaten from themselves⁷
eat a terrible bread...

The first two lines express the idea developed in the whole poem: love as the only sustaining power against destructiveness of humans and the universe. These lines are open to many philosophical interpretations. They cover the humanistic analysis of St. Paul (in the epistle of Paul, as Apostle of the Romans) on love and grace as gifts (given by God) to save the man from his self-destructiveness.⁸

Human beings, torn between the positive and the negative forces of the universe, as the poem says "beaten by the heaven and the earth," need love (grace-God) as the only solution. To reject love, is to accept destruction, as the poem suggests: "eat each other/eat themselves/eat terrible bread"/. The end of the poem points to the outcome of lack of love: hatred, spiritual emptiness, "chaff flying .

like empty hands." We can see how the poem mentioning "heavens" (the first line) introduces and develops the concept of Christian love, on which thousands of pages of philosophy have been devoted. In this respect, this poem is like a proverb developed in a few lines.

Man's perpetual struggle to find answers to questions, his path to wisdom, is another recurrent theme of Merwin's poetry. It always raises questions the answers of which establish phenomenological stance of the speaker thinking about the universe. Consequently, this poetry does not suggest the possibility of finding ultimate answers. The poem "Finding a Teacher" is a good example of that impossibility to find an absolute answer to the phenomenon of the universe:

In the woods I came on an old friend fishing
and I asked him a question
and he said Wait

fish were rising in the deep stream
but his line was not stirring
but I waited
it was a question about the sun

about my two eyes
my ears my mouth
my heart the earth with its four seasons
my feet where I was standing
where I was going

it slipped through my hands
as though it were water
into the river
it flowed under the trees
it sank under hulls far away
and was gone without me
then where I stood night fell

I no longer knew what to ask
 I could tell that his line had no hook
 I understood that I was to stay and eat with him⁹

The question the speaker asked is obviously about the universe and his place in it. (As he says, his question was "about his two eyes, his mouth...", and it goes further comprising the world around him). The answer to such a question comes in the last stanza: there is no answer, or the answer is: life is absurd, like fishing without a hook, but life as such is the only gift given to men from nature. This absurdity however is to be understood along the line of Camusian absurdity, by which the final futility of struggle in life, recognized as being bound by time (mortality), is to be celebrated as such, as the only thing given. The speaker decides to eat with the absurd fisherman. We know therefore, he understands and accepts the answer. He learns about his only choice: to live and accept the absurdity of man's position in the universe. Life is a gift of nature and as such it should be accepted even though the questions about it and the ratio between a single human life and the timelessness of the universe, reveal the minuteness of such a life.

So, the gift of life comes to man with a whole chaos of questions he poses around himself, as the last stanza of the poem "Gift" suggests:

... and my rising
 out of chaos
 come and be given...

After the speaker in the poem realizes that it is impossible to know everything about life, he decides to:

hold it up in my hands as my ribs hold up by heart
I have to let it open its wings and fly among the
gifts of the unknown...¹⁰

In other words, the speaker decides to accept and understand life as a phenomenon, along with the phenomena of the universe as a whole.

It seems that, according to Merwin, the usual path to knowledge of ourselves, of who we are, of what we are doing in this universe, is informed by gaining and losing the sense of our place in the universe. The perception of the reality around us never yields the same perception twice to any one person, as the poem "The Second Time" says:

the second time comes with an old picture
of something not there
it clings to the picture
as to its life¹¹

Into the reality perceived the second time, we always bring the old perception like "an old picture" of what we first perceived. When gaining the knowledge of one's own self comes into question, the struggle to comprehend reality and ourselves, becomes even more complicated. It seems that incomprehensions cluster in man's life until he finds himself losing, totally, the integrity of his own self. The poem "Sire" is one of the many examples in Merwin's poetry which talks about this perpetual struggle:

Which of my many incomprehensions
Did you bequeath me, and where did they take you?

Standing
 In the shoes of indecision, I hear them
 Come up behind me and go on ahead of me
 Wearing boots, or crutches, barefoot, they could
 never
 Get together on any door-sill or destination --
 The one with the assortment of smiles, the one
 Jailed in himself like a forest, the one who comes
 Back at evening drunk with despair and turns
 Into the wrong night as though he owned it--oh small
 Deaf disappearance in the dusk, in which of their
 shoes
 Will I find myself tomorrow?¹²

The personified "incomprehensions" appear as many persons tearing the integrity of the single mind into pieces. What is more, the different persons never "get together," as the poem says; the integrity of the human self is never completely restored. Analysis, self-analysis, even analysis of the self-analysis, constantly fragment the human mind; the mind is never at peace. The incomprehensions bequeathed to the speaker by the "sire" aren't indecisions which are solvable on a rational and intuitive level. These incomprehensions come from the perpetual questionings and analysis which leads towards jailing of the human mind into itself; feeding the self-destructive drive of the human irrationality. These incomprehensions constantly embrace the human mind in the incessant search for its own identity. As the poem says, human being from the one with an "assortment of smiles" to the one "drunk with despair" finds itself in "different shoes." The harmony and the integrity of one's identity is hardly achievable since it is impossible for the human mind to know itself, to analyse objectively the object of its analysis, its own self. The image of the mind divided

by self-analysis is recurrent throughout Merwin's poetry:

("Plane")

and with my mind infinitely divided and hopeless
like a stockyard seen from above
and my will like or withered body muffled
in qualifications until it has no shape
I bleed in my place¹³

Here the image of the human mind like a "divided stockyard" has a Dostoevskian quality and tone of the human being appalled by its own analytical self, like the Underground Man.

The poem "Finally" demonstrates best the mind's inability to surmount obstacles in attaining self-knowledge. The voice in the poem calls and names its own self:

My dread, my ignorance, my
Self, it is time...

It seems that the speaker has often experienced the futility of an attempt at mutual understanding with its own self. It says:

Do not now, if I rise to welcome you,
Make off like roads into the deep night
The dogs are dead at last, the locks toothless,
The habits out of reach.
I will not be false to you tonight.

Habits here are another obstacle to the cognition of the self, or more broadly, to the cognition of reality around the self. They lull human perceptiveness to epistemological slumber from which it is awakened in some illuminative moments, or, as Proust best defines them, the moments of

"involuntary memory." They are like a screen the human being has to pierce in order to see where he/she is, or possibly will be. What the voice seeks is told in the next stanza:

Come, no longer unthinkable. Let us share
 Understanding like a family name. Bring
 Integrity as a gift, something
 Which I had lost, which you found on the way.
 I will lay it beside us, the old knife,
 While we reach our conclusions.

The touch of irony here is unavoidable since the voice is aware of the impossibility of summoning up one's own self without destroying the unity of the self which the voice seeks. The integrity is like "the old knife;" it suggests the idea opposite to unity, something cut, divided. At the same time, the integrity will be laid beside while that integrity is reached. So, the idea of achieving integrity is to be realized through destroying the integrity with self-analysis; this is like a mental vivisection of the mind. The solution to this problem comes in the next stanza which proposes switching off some of the reflective, self-analytical processes in order for the self to be able to see itself as a whole. That is, the self-analytical processes drill into the mind too deeply for it to be able to hold a center:

Come. As a man who hears a sound at the gate
 Opens the window and puts out the light
 The better to see out into the dark,
 Look, I put it out.¹⁴

We come to the idea of human will as the most important power for controlling, switching off the numerous blurring

"lights" of consciousness, in order to be able to see. "The better to see out into the dark" that is, to free oneself from the imprisoning subjectivity in order to see oneself and the world in a more objective light. This provides more space for the rational power to build its edifices, its protective shelter against the destructive and the self-destructive forces. However, the desire of the human being to find shelter to protect itself from itself, that is, to free itself from one part of itself (destructive irrationality) is greater than the possibility of finding it. The oppressed human being lifts his head up to "the heavens."

Concepts like "god," "gods," "divinities," "stars," aren't rare in Merwin's poetry. From the existentialist position, the idea of "God" in the Christian religion, or the concept of "God" in general, is the embodiment of human longing for something permanent, stable: a system or a concept to encourage the human will to free itself of the destructive drives and "incomprehensions," which can lead to final inertia. This freedom is to be understood as the Nietzschean "freedom for," which is an active, creative freedom in any area of human thought and action. "God" is to be understood as a concept of love (Christian grace) which is to be a guiding light for humanity in the darkness, both inside (human nature) and outside (the phenomenal nature of the universe). The idea of love as a freely-given gift (Christ's sacrifice) is a positive ethical enactment of love, a redeeming power to release the positive (creative)

"lights" of consciousness, in order to be able to see. "The better to see out into the dark" that is, to free oneself from the imprisoning subjectivity in order to see oneself and the world in a more objective light. This freedom of one's self provides more space for the rational power to build its edifices, its protective shelter against the destructive and the self-destructive forces. However, the desire of the human being to find shelter to protect itself from itself, that is, to free itself from one part of itself (destructive irrationality) is greater than the possibility of finding it. The oppressed human being lifts his head up to "the heavens."

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(creative) part of humanity. Thus, love/grace is the first equation with God, which then leads to the second equation: love/God/creative freedom. I think that this interpretation of the concept of "God" in Merwin's poetry finds its supportive arguments in poems like "Midnight in Early Spring." The first stanza reveals an atmosphere of oppressive fear, created by the impossibility of seeing clearly through "the darkened panes:"

At one moment a few old leaves come in
frightened
and lie down together and stop moving
the nights now go in threes
as in a time of danger
the flies
sleep like sentries on the darkened panes

This fear is of the unknown which can strike the human being at any time. It reaches the point of Heideggerian "dread." It is a philosophical fear. As Heidegger defines it:

In dread, as we say, "one feels something uncanny." What is this "something" (es) and this "one?" We are unable to say what gives "one" that uncanny feeling. "One" just feels it generally (in Ganzen). All things, and we with them, sink into a sort of indifference but not in the sense that everything simply disappears, rather, in the very act of drawing away from us everything turns towards us. This withdrawal of what is-in-totality, which then crowds round us in dread, this is what oppresses us. There is nothing to hold on to. The only thing that remains and overwhelms us whilst what-is slips away, is this "nothing."
Dread reveals Nothing.

In this state of "dread" everything turns towards us, that is, the whole universe in a chaotic state raises innumerable questions without possible answers. The mind

is oppressed; it needs a firm structure to lean on. The second stanza seems to announce the possibility of help which the human mind (the voice in the poem) feels it should come as an "alien blessing:"

some alien blessing
is on its way to us
some prayer ignored for centuries
is about to be granted to the prayerless
in this place

In this "blessing" or "prayer," love? It seems that the lines: "ignored for centuries" and "is about to be granted to the prayerless" suggest that it is love, since love even though recognized as a possible solution throughout centuries, (in the Christian religion and philosophy) has never won completely. It (love) has been "ignored for centuries," as the poem says, by mankind always engaged in wars and all sorts of destruction. But the solution that love can bring, is always to be granted to "the prayerless" if they can accept it. The poem tries to define the solution in the next stanza, posing questions about it, (however, not about its origin):

who were you
cold voice born in captivity
rising
last martyr of a hope
last word of a language
other half of grief
who were you

However, the speaker in the poem is aware how hard the help from "the blessing" is to come. But what is important is that it is "the last word....," that is, the final and the only solution against destructiveness of

mankind.

The last stanza surprises, fascinates with its condensation of the idea of love as freedom. What it tells in three short lines, condenses pages and pages of religious, existential, psychoanalytical thought of centuries:

so that we may know why
when the streams
wake tomorrow and we are free¹⁵

Actually, as we mentioned before, the nucleus of this idea is that since man is irrational, destructive; since the phenomenal nature of the universe doesn't offer any final, ultimate answers to his questions, man needs something to hold onto--a system, a concept.

The simplicity of the last stanza, and at the same time, its power to encompass complexity of thought is amazing. The word which bears the biggest load in the stanza is the word "streams." "The streams" as life in general, "the stream" as water which give life to man and the earth, they (life, men, earth) "wake" as "free" if the answer is found, that is, love ("the alient blessing").

The search for the meanings that "gods" embody--present in the religious and philosophical thought of centuries--appears often in this poetry. In the poem "plane" the meaning of "gods" is referred to as "essential nakedness of the gods."

where is no
vision of the essential nakedness of the gods
nor for that
nakedness the seamless garment of heaven

The voice in the poem is confronted with a negative view, that an essential meaning cannot be found, it is confronted with only "air:"

Here
is the air¹⁶

However, the poem "Gods" seems to have found one definition for "the gods." After listening to the "blows" of "fighting in the valley," which goes on for centuries; after recognizing the "mourning" and "grief" throughout centuries of man's existence, the speaker says:

The gods are what has failed to become of us...

The line is like a proverb about the notion of gods as embodiments of man's perpetual struggle for high values and immortality, which, failing to find them on the earth, man projects on "heaven" as fictitious beings with omnipotent power. This line reflects a Marxist, materialist explanation of the existence of religions. However, it shares some aspects with the Nietzschean concept of the "ubermensch" who is to replace God who was pronounced dead in the XIX and XX Century:

God is dead. God remains dead. And we have killed him... Is not the greatness of this deed too great for us? Must not we ourselves become gods simply to seem worthy of it?¹⁷

Whether human beings can come close to being "gods" is a question which Merwin's poem does not raise. What follows in the stanza after the quoted line is a reconciliation with the fact that humans are only guests on this

planet, bound by time (their mortality). Even though humanity has spilled blood conquering and defeating itself and the universe, the universe does not belong to men:

What is man that he should be infinite
The music of a deaf planet
The one note
Continues clearly this is

The other world
These strewn rocks belong to the wind
If it could use them¹⁸

Merwin is not proposing a modest attitude towards life; he is confronting the place of humans in relation to their "gods" and in relation to the timeless universe.

Charting the manifold concept of "god" or "gods" ("divinities") found in Merwin's poetry, we must observe that in the poem "Bread and Butter," "the gods" are abandoned; the speaker of the poem finds his letter written to them. The letter suggests that the speaker has struggled with the concept of "gods," because of the necessity imposed on him by his own nature, which is to find and explain the "visions of today and of tomorrow," that is, his place in the universe:

I keep finding this letter
To the gods of abandon,
Tearing it up: Sirs,
Having lived in your shrines
I know what I owe you --

The third and fourth stanzas explain the necessity of dealing with this concept:

Why would I start such a letter?
Think of today, think of tomorrow.
Today on the tip of my tongue,

Today with my eyes,
Tomorrow the vision,
Tomorrow

In the broken window
The broken boats will come in,
The life boats
Waving their severed hands,

And I will love as I ought to
Since the beginning.¹⁹

The vision of "tomorrow" is never clear. The speaker anticipates a permanent chaotic vision of reality where nothing is ultimately definite: the "life boats" are "broken," the "hands" (the oars) are "severed." "The window" through which life boats are seen approaching is "broken." Disunity is suggested. However, the speaker realizes that the only response, the only answer to such disjointed reality is, or should be, love. Here, love is acceptance, an affirmation of life as it is. It seems that the speaker, after rejecting gods as giving meaning to his life, returns to the meaning-giving concept, love. Is this concept identical to the Christian concept of God/love? We cannot find a definite answer in this poem, since the plural "gods," for example in Greek mythology, is not equivalent to the concept of love. The plural, "gods," is more equivalent to man's complex nature. In general, "gods" are equivalent to life which man "ought to love since the beginning," as the poem says.

The voice in Merwin's poetry strikes us with its phenomenological stance in its outlook on the universe. From the tortured and oppressed human mind with questions and incomprehensions which produce fear, despair, puzzlement

and other emotions accompanying our existence, the speaker in this poetry raises his head for help. He struggles with the concept of "god," "gods." This poetry reveals the human being catching all existential (philosophical) "illnesses" throughout his existence, to end up grasping firmly the explanation of the world as phenomenon.

Consequently, the tone of this poetry is constantly calmed down when the emotional charge (after the futile attempt to find the answers) forces the voice to shout, as in the two-line poem "Savonarola:"

Unable to endure my world and caling the failure
God, I will destroy yours.²⁰

The speculative nature of this poetry constantly muffles the outcry of the voice. We might say that the philosophical approach in this poetry balances the psychology (the emotions) as in the poem "Teachers," where the voice, going through pain, and after the loud outcry, consoles itself:

but I say to myself you are not a child now
if the night is long remember your unimportance
sleep²¹

The general quietness of the tone comes from the gnostic quality of the poetry, which articulates and expresses the essence of truths, the nuclei of ideas and concepts on which thousands of pages in the history of philosophy and religion have been devoted.

Another concept in the line of the existential themes, raising some questions and imposing its significance for humans, is loneliness. It is a recurrent motif of Merwin's

poetry. Besides the existential basis it gives this concept, this poetry also reveals some psychological aspects of loneliness. The poem "Dogs" begins with the idea of physical loneliness:

Many times loneliness
is someone else
an absence
then when loneliness is no longer
someone else many times
it is someone else's dog
that you're keeping
then when the dog disappears
and the dog's absence
you are alone at last...

After the physical loneliness, the poem speaks of spiritual loneliness. Thus, this poem talking about different aspects of loneliness, resembles a short treatise on the theme: loneliness.

and loneliness many times
is yourself
that absence...

The poem doesn't stop at this existential treatment of loneliness, it gives the psychological aspect:

but at last it may be
that you are your own dog
hungry on the way
the one sound climbing a mountain
higher than time²²

Loneliness is like hunger, never satisfied. It is hunger which "eats" the hungry one. It "gnaws" the mind; it is like a god: "You are your own dog."

Loneliness can be present even in the presence of another human being. Again, this kind of loneliness suggests its existential basis; that is, it suggests the notion of

a human being as an island. Such loneliness starts "beyond" the physical and the spiritual presence of the other. The poem "Beyond You" best articulates the idea of loneliness starting "beyond" the presence of the other:

... if I can stand I will be standing by the last
 one
 calling you
 who are so near that I cannot believe you
 and when I call the calling begins
 beyond you²³

This stanza also opens an epistemological aspect. Perception and comprehension of reality when one is so close to the object of perception is impossible. The speaker needs distance to understand and comprehend the presence, the existence of the other. The perception is blurred when the object of perception (here another human being) is too close.

Fear of loneliness is present throughout Merwin's poetry. The chanting voice of this fear is heard everywhere in the poetry, like in the poem "Fear:"

...fear I am alone forever I am
 fear I am alone I fear I am
 not alone couldn't tell your breath from fear²⁴

The quiet tone is often interrupted by the emotionally charged voice. We often referred to this aspect as psychological; emotions revealed in the poems exist alongside the speculation on existential (philosophical) issues as we saw in the last two quoted poems ("Dogs" and "Beyond You"). The general tone approached from the aspect of recurrent themes and motives reveals itself as reflective,

quiet; from time to time interrupted by emotions which are immediately balanced, tempered with the philosophical wisdom Merwin's poetry constantly strives for.

CONCLUSION

As we see, throughout these three essays speculation emerges as one of the most important principles of Merwin's poetics. As a substantiation of the idea of Naming, speculation is an aesthetic principle as well as an epistemological one. Speculation as such, reflects the relationship between the personal epistemology and the aesthetic of W.S. Merwin's poetry. With other words, the way the poet discovers reality is named through speculation, and, speculation presenting the process of discovering reality itself, substantiates the idea of Naming which basically implies reality transferred in the poem as opposed to reality re-created through metaphorical change.

Besides a speculative way of presentation of any experience in the poem, speculation can be a subject matter; the poem becomes a speculation upon speculation. However, it is hard to draw a line between the two, because the speculative way of presentation of an experience revealing some aspects of the process, speculates upon itself. In the analysed poem "Walk-up" we saw how the speaker speculating upon some physical details which surround him reveals the connections between thought and perception at the moment of speculation. Thus, the poem reveals some aspects of the speculation as a process.

Speculation as an aesthetic principle in general is more than a reflection upon a particular poetic experience, and more than a particular mode of presentation of the experience. It is mimesis, an imitation of the multifaceted

reality. In the poem reality appears as a particular poetic experience developed and presented as an organic structure.

Speculation is the only action in the poem; the poem through speculation either anticipates an action, or presents a reflection upon the action. It is in this sense that I call Merwin's poetry speculative in comparison to other speculative types of poetry.

Discussing the general tone of Merwin's poetry, we saw that the poetic language neglects the speculative rhythm. The variations of short lines ending in the middle of statements slow down the rhythm revealing a break of thought, a digression, after which a silence, or an outcry of the voice emotionally charged, follows. Repetitions of a word, or a phrase, speed the rhythm revealing the human mind dwelling on some incomprehensible aspects of the experience.

Lack of punctuation also contributes to the speculative rhythm of Merwin's poetry suggesting often an uninterrupted flow of thought.

Some forms of poetic expression, like psalms and prayers, reveal the speculative process through characteristics like repetitions and monologue, which convey the speculative rhythm. We might say that speculation and the speculative rhythm are part of the essential structure of these forms, because monologue as a form of poetic discourse here, is or unavoidably leads towards speculation, where since the action-response between the two as in dialogue is absent, the human mind in the process of thinking unavoidably undergoes a process of speculation.

The general speculative tone of Merwin's poetry also comes from the recurrent existential themes and motifs. The condensed way of expression of these recurrent themes, almost proverbial, reflects the complexity of some general truths and human recurrent situations, "typical and recurrent enough for men to feel the need of having a name for them." With other words, this proverbial language of Merwin's poetry, reflects situations which are approached from many aspects like: psychological, philosophical, etc. We can say that in this poetry philosophy and psychology maintain an equilibrium: the emotionally charged poetic voice is soothed, tempered, by the speculative, philosophical tone which the poem resumes after an emotional peak.

Thus, at the end, we come to the initially suggested proposition: Merwin's epistemology reflected through his aesthetic, and his aesthetic (poetics) coming as a result of the epistemology. Speculation is the point where these two aspects of the creative process meet. It (speculation) appears as operative principle of the epistemology as well as an aesthetic principle through which the idea of Naming, another aesthetic principle, is realized.

NOTES

¹ Kenneth Burke, The Philosophy of Literary Form, 3rd ed. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1973), p. 3.

² The Moving, p. 53.

³ The Carrier, p.8.

⁴ The Carrier, p. 4.

⁵ The Moving, p. 13.

⁶ The Carrier, p. 7.

⁷ The Carrier, p. 125.

⁸ The recognition of the "unrighteousness" of man, that is, of his destructive irrationality as an innate human characteristic, is central humanistic point in the epistle. Sin, destructive irrationality is present in one who acts, commits sin, and in the one who does not act, as a negative potential:

For we know that the law is spiritual:
But I am carnal, sold under sin.

For that I do, I allow not: for
what I would, that do I not; but what
I hate, that do I (Romans 7:14-15)

⁹ Writings, p. 91.

¹⁰ Writings, p. 112.

¹¹ Writings, p. 68.

¹² The Moving, p. 21.

¹³ The Carrier, p.3.

¹⁴ The Moving, p. 22.

¹⁵ Martin Heidegger, "What is Metaphysics?" in Existentialism from Dostoevsky to Sartre, trans. and ed. Walter Kaufman, rev. ed. (New York: New American Library, 1975), p. 249.

¹⁶ The Carrier, p. 75.

¹⁷ The Carrier, p. 3.

- 18 Friedrich Nietzsche, "The Gay Science," in Existentialism form Dostoevsky to Sartre, p. 126.
- 19 The Lice, pp. 30-31.
- 20 The Moving, p. 55.
- 21 The Moving, p. 13.
- 22 The Carrier, p. 4.
- 23 Writings, p. 81.
- 24 Writings, p. 21.
- 25 The Carrier, p. 85.
- 26 Burke, The Philosophy of Literary Form, p. 3.

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